



LAND USE PLAN

January 22, 2008

K|P|S
G R O U P

THE CITY OF GULF SHORES

MAYOR: George W. Duke, III

CITY COUNCIL: Joe Garris, Place 1
Carolyn M. Doughty, Place 2
Philip Harris, Place 3
Robert S. Craft, Place 4
Stephen E. Jones, Place 5

PLANNING COMMISSION: Robert Steiskal, Jr., CAPZO, Chairman
Larry Parris, CAPZO, Vice Chairman
Bill Bender
Hartley Brokenshaw, CAPZO
Owen Gray, CAPZO
Philip Harris
Frank Malone
Pete Vakakes

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT:
Steve Foote, AICP, Director
Andy Bauer, AICP, Zoning Administrator
Sherri Smith, Administrative Assistant
Jennifer Watkins, Planner
Nancy Moon, Planner
Norman Anthony, Code Enforcement Officer

Adopted by the Planning Commission: January 22, 2008

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAN	1
USING AND REFINING THE PLAN	2
II. CITYWIDE DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT	3
GULF SHORES TOWN MEETING 2007	3
Assets.....	3
Issues	4
Why People Choose to Live/Work/Invest in Gulf Shores	4
Missing from Visions for Gulf Shores	5
GULF SHORES STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT	7
Major Elements of the Concept.....	7
CONCLUSION	14
III. MAJOR DEVELOPMENT COMPONENTS	15
GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE	15
Green Infrastructure Policies.....	17
GATEWAYS, ACTIVITY CENTERS AND CORRIDORS	17
Citywide Activity Center Policies.....	19
Downtown Gulf Shores	20
Gulf Place and the Beach	22
Gateways and Image Corridors	23
Community Commercial Centers.....	25
Neighborhood Centers.....	26
Employment Support Centers	28
Institutional Support Centers.....	28
Major Recreational Centers.....	29
NEIGHBORHOODS	31
Neighborhood Planning and Design Criteria	33
CONCLUSION	34
IV. THE USE OF LAND.....	35
MAJOR DEVELOPMENT THEMES.....	35
LAND USE TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS.....	38
Open Space, Parks, Recreation and Protected Areas	39
Residential	40
Mixed Use	41

Civic and Institutional	43
Commercial and Office	43
Industrial.....	46
CONCLUSION	46
 V. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION	47
GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT REGULATION	47
Zoning Ordinance and Map Considerations.....	48
Subdivision Regulation Considerations	49
Additional Development Review Criteria.....	50
SPECIFIC PLANS AND PLAN IMPLEMENTATION	53
KEEPING THE LAND USE PLAN UP TO DATE.....	54
ANNEXATION	56
Annexation Criteria	56
 VI. CONCLUSION	59
VII. AMENDMENTS.....	59
 APPENDIX.....	61
TOWN MEETING NOTES	61
ASSETS.....	61
ISSUES.....	61
WHY LIVE, WORK, INVEST IN GULF SHORES	61
MISSING FROM CITYWIDE VISIONS.....	62
MISSING FROM NEIGHBORHOOD VISIONS	62
BENCHMARKS FOR TESTING THE PLAN.....	62
FUTURE LAND USE MAPS.....	63
NOTES	65

CITY OF GULF SHORES

LAND USE PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAN

The Land Use Plan illustrates and provides an overall strategy for how Gulf Shores intends to shape itself over time. The city has prepared this plan as a guide to decisions regarding land use, development, zoning and capital improvements.

The plan is also intended to help Gulf Shores residents, property owners, merchants, builders and developers invest in the city by providing a reasonable expectation of the city's future. Throughout the planning process, Gulf Shores has intended to inform and guide decisions to bring about the desired future state of the city. The plan is long-range, general, and focused on physical development. Consequently, the community may be assured that the plan is a living document whose relevance will continue even as circumstances change over time.

Through the Gulf Shores Land Use Plan, city officials wish to:

- *Illustrate the ways in which the city should develop over time.*
- *Provide a guide to development decisions and a basis for making and revising zoning and other regulations regarding type, intensity and timing of development that will help to balance the city as a family-oriented tourist destination and a neighborhood-oriented community.*
- *Ensure that as development occurs, the city's most significant natural features will be preserved or enhanced, even as property values are protected.*
- *Provide a pattern for land use and development that strives for a sustainable community with a diversified tax base to support desired facilities and services.*
- *Coordinate land use recommendations with those for infrastructure improvements.*

In response, the City Council, Planning Commission and the citizens of Gulf Shores intend to continually refer to this document in order to:

- *Visualize what type and scale of land use may reasonably be expected to occur in Gulf Shores in appropriate locations to provide reasonable assurance and security regarding development investment decisions.*
- *Review and evaluate development proposals—to test the fit with the vision and expectations held by the citizens of Gulf Shores.*
- *Review rezoning requests—as an essential part of determining appropriateness.*
- *Provide guidance regarding adoption of development regulations and amendments.*
- *Identify and advise regarding priorities for infrastructure investments—roads, greenways, parks, schools and other public facilities.*

The Gulf Shores Land Use Plan recognizes the value of the city's underlying natural resources and its history and traditional community values. The plan will guide development by balancing growth with the conservation of important natural resources, such as dunes, wetlands, and native vegetation and habitats. The city's planned activity centers concentrate a diversity of functions at appropriate locations, structured by overall citywide open space and accessibility systems. These activity centers are planned and located to enhance the city as a family-oriented tourist destination and a neighborhood-oriented community. Land uses that are planned, located and designed in a manner that is compatible with this concept will be supported and encouraged.

USING AND REFINING THE PLAN

The Land Use Plan is a combination of vision, maps, development policies and design guidelines. It provides a framework for guiding public and private decisions that will affect the growth, development and redevelopment of Gulf Shores. The plan is based on the community's vision for its own future—a long-term vision that may not be achievable in the lifetime of those participating in drafting the plan, or even of the next generation. Nevertheless, the plan looks ahead, focuses on the physical form of the city, and strives to shape development of public and private properties within the Gulf Shores planning area.

As noted earlier, the plan provides a general, long-range *guide* to future development—to assist public officials and private citizens alike as they consider making investments that may have long-term implications for the community. To do this, the plan must be continuously monitored and renewed as changes occur in physical, social, political and market conditions. That is the case with this document, which is built upon the base provided by several recent planning and design efforts, including: the *Citywide Framework Plan*, *Envision Gulf Shores Plan*, *Plash Island/Bon Secour River Land Use Study*, and the *Fort Morgan Peninsula Study*. The plan will be implemented through the actions of developers and other private citizens, city staff, the Planning Commission, other boards and commissions, and the City Council. Major public actions in support of plan implementation will include adoption, revision and enforcement of various parts of the city's growth management system: development regulations, capital improvement planning and budgeting, and decisions about the appropriateness of development proposals. Guidance provided by this monitoring and renewal process will assist the city in refining and detailing the Land Use Plan through consideration of amendments as needed.

It should be noted that the maps in this document are small-scale representations of the large-scale original maps that are maintained on the city's digital network. The Land Use Plan is intended to be a living document, to evolve and grow in response to changes in public values and to market and physical conditions. Only through continuing use, evaluation, detailing, reconsideration and amendment can the plan fully serve Gulf Shores, and only then can the people of Gulf Shores use it wisely as a creative tool toward achievement of its comprehensive vision for the community.

II. CITYWIDE DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

The choice for Gulf Shores is not one of growth vs. no growth. The city has made itself into a family-oriented tourist destination and an attractive and desirable place for full-time residents. The city continues to draw more people and private investment every year. Unless national and regional tourism and development trends that support its growth—and the public investment and commitment that has created this place—could somehow be reversed, tourism and residential growth will continue, along with expansion of support facilities and services. The choice, then, is one of how development should be channeled in a manner compatible with the vision the people of Gulf Shores have set for themselves and their community. That is the role of the city's continuing planning process.

Gulf Shores has used a systematic approach to determine a citywide vision for the future, set long-range goals for the physical character of the city, and devised policies to move the city toward fulfillment of those goals. The focal point of this process in Gulf Shores has been dialog between citizens and their elected and administrative officials. The purpose has been to reach consensus regarding an appropriate physical character and the responsibilities of city government in each of its areas of control and influence.

GULF SHORES TOWN MEETING 2007

Citizens and visitors and city officials kicked off this land use planning process with a Town Meeting on February 1, 2007. The participants were presented a brief overview of the city and its resources, using maps of existing physical features, including topography, hydrology, existing land use patterns and road infrastructure.

During the session, participants responded to a series of questions designed to elicit comments and suggestions that would help the Planning Commission and City Council prepare a physical vision for the city as they considered its future. What follows below is a summary of the main topics of the discussion in each of several categories. An outline of participant responses is provided in the Appendix.

Assets

Meeting participants expressed very positive attitudes about their city. The natural environment, with the city's beaches, the lagoon, canals, and Bon Secour Wildlife Refuge is a major feature of the city. Community character, including the range of available facilities, is highly appealing. The city is mostly developed at a fairly low density, with generous amounts of open space in and around the community. The presence of the airport, the civic center, library and park facilities in the heart of town, and the ability to walk and bicycle to nearby destinations are all appreciated.



Balanced with the key element of a family-oriented environment in the quality of life of Gulf Shores and its varied neighborhoods is a similar family-friendly attitude toward beach tourism and recreation amenities. The city is known for its open space and for accessibility to its beaches. Boating and fishing rank high, as do golf, tennis, and general recreation in the town's parks, sports fields and recreation centers.

Issues

Town meeting participants acknowledged that work remains to be done to bring the city up to the standards they hold both individually and collectively. Several responses were directly related to transportation and accessibility within the community. For example, Highway 59 is the only direct way in/out of town across the Intracoastal Waterway. Further, it lacks sidewalks and bicycle lanes, and is highly congested with traffic during peak periods.

The participants noted that while Gulf Shores is a highly walkable place, there are not enough sidewalks, trails and greenways interconnecting the places they want to get to other than by car—which are virtually everywhere in the community. They also listed a lack of public transportation as a community liability, especially with regard to how this affects the mobility of older residents.

Other community infrastructure topics raised during this discussion included drainage, road maintenance, undersized schools, a lack of convention facilities and no commercial service at the airport.

Meeting participants highlighted elements of community character and development that were of concern to them. Beach access is a highly positive aspect of the community, but participants want more access to the beaches and along the beaches—many beach areas are underused, while certain locations are overused and overcrowded during peak periods. Other issues were the desire for more access to the Gulf and to Little Lagoon, and the slow pace of restoration of beach areas damaged by major storms.



Why People Choose to Live/Work/Invest in Gulf Shores

The Town Meeting drew a good cross-section of the community, and they were asked why they chose to live, work or invest in Gulf Shores as opposed to other opportunities they may have had. The participants shared their appreciation of the combination of hometown feeling and the desirable elements of a Gulf Coast resort community: small town atmosphere, a beach nearby, with nature, wildlife and a variety of recreational opportunities.

People know each other; it's a family-oriented environment, a place the children will come back to after college or working somewhere else for a while. The schools are well thought of, there is a low crime rate, and safety is hardly ever an issue. Participants spoke of the business opportunities and the favorable tax structure. The family orientation of the place—both for the residents and the beach-seeking tourists—seems to be working in this Gulf Coast city.

Missing from Visions for Gulf Shores

Building from the discussions of assets, issues, outside influences and the reasons people are drawn to the city, the Town Meeting participants were asked to envision Gulf Shores as they would like it to be in a decade or so. Following a few moments in which to think about those desired future conditions, each person present was asked to share with the others one significant physical aspect of their idealized future community that is absent from Gulf Shores as it exists today. They began with citywide characteristics.

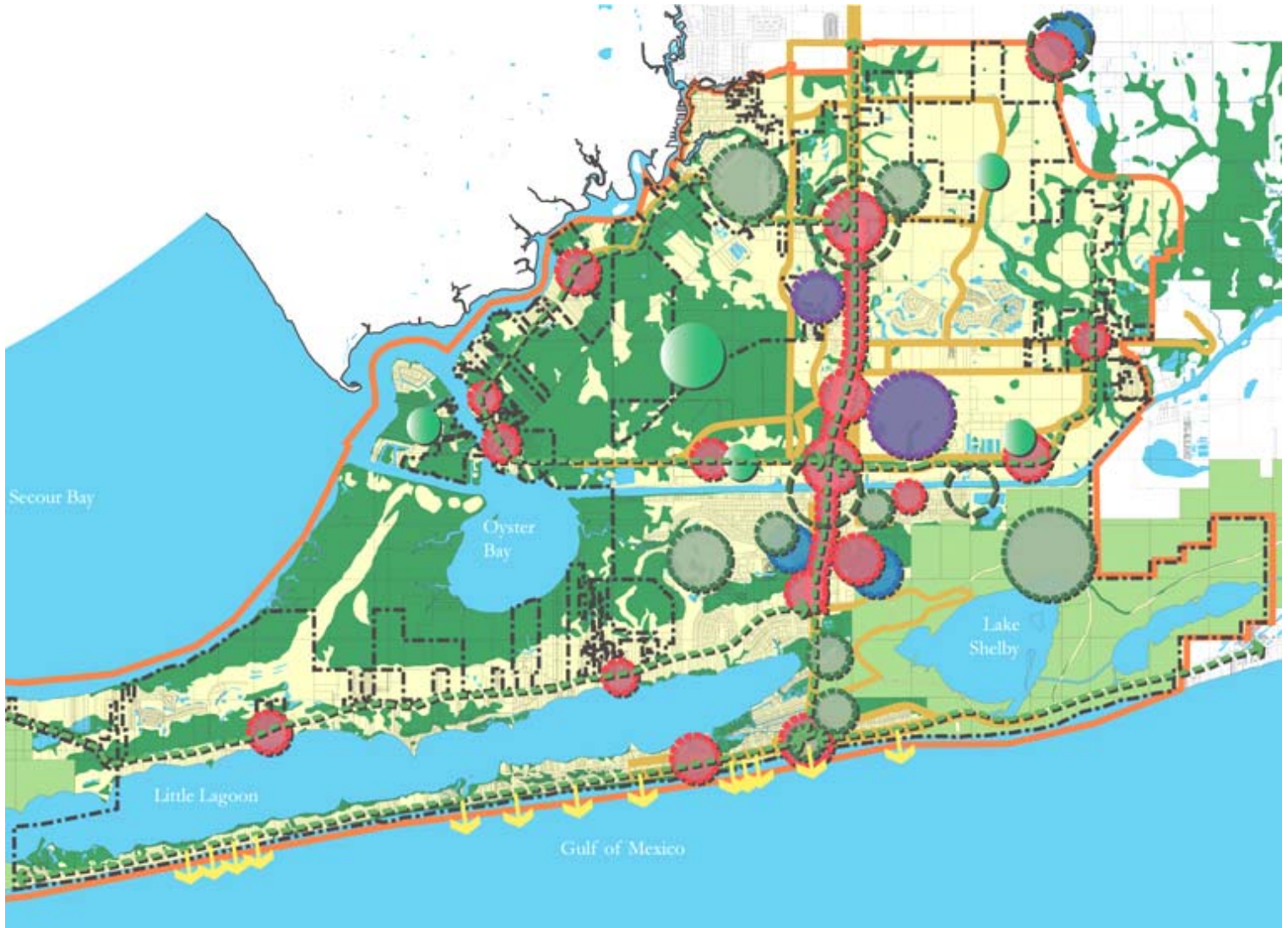
Local people want legible, welcoming entrances to the city. They desire a city with a positive overall image, including public and private improvements in the downtown and new, affordable, yet high-quality neighborhood development. In general, the participants indicated their desire for increased residential development that would be able to support a more diverse range of stable, local businesses and create more business investment opportunities that result in greater range and availability of goods, services, and local employment opportunities. At the same time, people do not want to give up open space and the natural environment, which everyone seems to value highly.

The participants (likely thinking ahead a few years) desired that the city become even more accessible to retirees. They suggested a more diverse support system that would include nursing and other medical facilities—including a regional hospital—and personal and professional services that would be easier to walk to. Additional assisted and independent living facilities would be available for older residents, in locations accessible for meeting daily needs.

Gulf Shores would become a truly walking and biking city, with upgraded sidewalks—both within its neighborhoods and between neighborhoods and nearby activity centers. Parks and recreation areas and schools would be interconnected by greenways and trails. There would be public transportation opportunities, both within the city and linking Gulf Shores to nearby communities. There would be commercial air service to the airport.

Additional public facilities were mentioned, such as tourist destinations other than the beaches, perhaps a convention center and a cultural or fine arts center. Others suggested a beach boardwalk and fishing piers, and recreation areas distributed across the entire city. Better regional accessibility was mentioned several times, and the long-discussed express route to interconnect with Interstates 10 and 65 to the north to help manage traffic and reduce congestion on Highway 59 through the city.

Others spoke of individual neighborhoods, and their desires for small-scale commerce within walking distance, improved neighborhood interaction and inter-accessibility, consistent road maintenance and improved drainage, underground utilities, street lighting and landscape maintenance, parking management near the beaches, improved access to Little Lagoon, and opening up the small canals for boats.



Strategic Development Concept Map

GULF SHORES STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

The strategy for Gulf Shores is based on the strong value system of local residents and the positive attitudes and responses they shared with one another during the Town Meeting, in combination with the citywide vision that emerged from the city's 2007 Strategic Plan:

Gulf Shores: A clean, attractive, safe, friendly, family oriented, beachside community, with an excellent quality of life for all residents and visitors, with a protected environment and a year-round sustainable economy.

Major Elements of the Concept

Creating and seizing upon community-wide opportunities begins with the city core and the overall image of the city. The concept builds on the value of the city's physical setting, placing commerce, industry and institutions in locations that will be accessible to the community and its trade area, as appropriate. It accounts for the need to improve accessibility of all kinds and to protect the city's traditional business and residential streets and continue to build networks. The strategy focuses attention on upgrading the city's infrastructure systems and building its civic and recreation facilities while expanding its public safety facilities and services.

The Strategic Development Concept builds upon the citywide vision by enhancing the physical organization of Gulf Shores with a series of activity centers that support, and are supported by, the city's neighborhoods. The various types of these activity centers in this concept—commercial, light industrial, civic, institutional and recreational—are intended to serve as magnets for activity and development to support the city core and the residential neighborhoods of Gulf Shores in ways that will positively affect the quality of life, the natural environment, and local and regional transportation networks.

- *A comprehensive strategy will guide planning and design for land resource development and conservation.*
- *Gulf Shores will be a legible city—its edges and districts will be clear and visitors will be readily able to find their destinations. The gateways to the city will be well defined and each of the arterial and collector streets will reflect an image that is appropriate to its location.*
- *The city's "green infrastructure," consisting of its park and recreation system, in combination with its surface water resources, floodplains and wetlands, augmented by major portions of its tree cover, will be conserved and respected by the city's development management system.*
- *Development and conservation planning and design will be managed using an overall system of regulation and public investment in accord with the city's Land Use Plan.*

- *The city will have a plan and program for annexation of territory that supports its planned image, health, safety, and welfare.*
- *Neighborhoods will be planned, designed and built to provide a focus and a sense of place to their residents and the community at large.*
- *The city's park and recreation system, including passive and active parks and outdoor recreation facilities, will be enlarged, expanded and focused on the needs of neighborhoods to meet the needs of the city's growing population.*
- *Downtown will clearly be the civic heart of the community, with:*
 - *A major civic node, with opportunities for infill and reinvestment along and adjacent to West First Street.*
 - *A community business area, with investment focused upon improved pedestrian and bicycle access along and adjacent to East Second Street.*
- *The city's commercial development will be organized mostly into activity centers at logical intersections of arterials and collector streets, and along corridors designated for such uses. Such activity centers will:*
 - *Focus/concentrate commercial development along Highway 59 to create special places that provide an attractive image to residents, tourists, and investors.*
 - *Establish conveniently located, neighborhood-scale activity centers along Fort Morgan Road to serve the needs of residents and tourists away from Highway 59.*
 - *Establish neighborhood-scale activity centers convenient to Plash Island/Bon Secour River area.*
- *Gulf Place will become a mixed-use activity center focused on beach-oriented tourism support functions.*
- *The Intracoastal Waterway will become a mixed-use corridor dominated by waterfront-dependent uses, including lodging, dining, commerce, marinas, parks and recreation primarily within the north-east, north-west and south-east quadrants.*
- *Northeastern Gulf Shores will include a mixed-use activity center that will:*
 - *Capitalize on regional accessibility and bring together Gulf Shores and its neighboring cities in a cooperative development effort.*
 - *Encourage medical facilities development with appropriate and supportive commerce and a mix of residential development.*
- *Industrial development will be directed to the city's industrial park and toward sites used previously for industrial and other intensive purposes.*
- *Access to all arterial and collector streets will be managed carefully to conserve their capacity and ensure safe travel.*
- *All activity centers, neighborhoods, schools, recreational amenities, and cultural facilities will be interconnected through a combination of safe, attractive sidewalks, greenways, trails and other bicycle and pedestrian facilities.*

GOALS

The following goals and supporting policies reflect the major elements of the Strategic Development Concept and are further described in the following chapters.

Land Use

GOAL LU-1: Use and build on the existing plans and studies for Gulf Shores (Envision Gulf Shores Plan, Plash Island/Bon Secour River Land Use Study, Beach Study Area Build-out Analysis and Recommendations, City Framework Plan, Major Thoroughfare Plan, and Master Sidewalk and Bicycle Plan).

Policy LU-1.1 The Comprehensive Plan and Proposed Development

Measure development against the Comprehensive Plan to see if it fits within the existing and desired fabric of the city as expressed within the plan.

Policy LU-1.2 The Comprehensive Plan and Development Management

Maintain consistency between the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan with the Zoning Ordinance and the Subdivision Regulations.

Policy LU-1.3 Additions and Revisions to the Comprehensive Plan

Prepare additional plans as needed to identify, protect, develop and integrate land use and development. Examples of plans can be specific area plans for Downtown, beach development, bikeways and sidewalks, and tree planting plans.

Policy LU-1.4 Planning and the Comprehensive Plan

Keep the Comprehensive Plan up to date and in harmony with supporting ordinances and regulations as needed to ensure compatibility with the citizens of Gulf Shores and their desired vision for the city.

GOAL LU-2: Promote a compact development pattern within a well-defined city boundary.

Policy LU-2.1 Compact Urban Form

Create discernable, compact activity centers and an orderly land development pattern, providing for a range of land uses.

Policy LU-2.2 Density

Promote the development of a variety of housing types and densities for persons of all income levels and ages based upon orderly and appropriate development patterns as defined in the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance.

Land Use (cont.)

Policy LU-2.3 Infill

Promote infill and redevelopment of existing sites and facilities, in order to capitalize on existing services.

Policy LU-2.4 Annexation

Pursue annexation of properties contiguous to the current boundary in accord with the Comprehensive Plan.

Policy LU-2.5 Property Values

Balance property values with opportunities for development.

GOAL LU-3: Maintain and enhance the City's character and sense of place as defined by its neighborhoods, districts, corridors, and edges.

Policy LU-3.1 Preservation

Promote the preservation of older and existing residential neighborhoods, structures and facilities.

Policy LU-3.2 Activity Centers

Promote development in activity centers, which shall capitalize on their locations and context with the city, as defined in the plan.

Policy LU-3.3 Activity Centers and their Context

Design activity centers to relate to their context, using the principles found within the plan and the city's zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations. Downtown shall be promoted as the civic heart of the community. Develop Gulf Place and the Intra-coastal Waterway as special, mixed use activity centers and corridors that capitalize on their waterfront locations.

Policy LU-3.4 Urban Design

Use the design review process, supplemented by design standards and guidelines, to promote new construction and redevelopment that contribute positively to the type of neighborhoods, districts, corridors and edges described in the plan while emphasizing the special identity of each area.

Policy LU-3.5 Buffers

Require the provision of adequate buffering techniques to assure compatibility between adjacent land uses.

Transportation

GOAL T-1 Organize the city with a framework of transportation alternatives that balance access, mobility, safety and emergency response.

Policy T-1.1 Land Use Patterns

Implement and support land use patterns, parking policies, and demand management plans that support effective transit, an efficient roadway system, and sidewalks and bikeways to support alternative transportation modes.

Policy T-1.2 Gateways

Plan, design and build gateways to the city, neighborhoods, activity centers and commercial corridors that provide a welcoming introduction.

Policy T-1.3 Image Corridors

Create quality development and landscaping along all streets, especially upon streets identified as image corridors to beautify the streetscape, and develop and maintain the character and unique appearance of Gulf Shores.

Policy T-1.4 Connectivity

Interconnect activity centers, neighborhoods, schools, recreation, and cultural facilities with complete streets and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Policy T-1.5 Roadway Capacity

Conserve capacity and ensure safe travel through access management practices on major roads.

Policy T-1.6 Mass Transit

Support the development of regional transit through creation of discernable, compact activity centers.

Policy T-1.7 Alternate Transportation

Establish a dependable, system of bicycle routes and walking trails throughout the city to serve as an alternative transportation system and to promote and provide connections to neighborhoods, schools, parks and activity centers.

Residential

GOAL R-1: Promote a variety of housing types and densities throughout the community.

Policy R-1.1 Land Use Patterns

Encourage a variety of housing types and densities, including mixed-used developments that are well served by public transportation and close to employment centers, services, and amenities. In particular, the city will promote the siting of higher density housing near public transportation, shopping, and in designated neighborhoods and districts.

Policy R-1.2 Housing Supply

Encourage public and private, for-profit and non-profit sectors to take actions to develop and maintain an adequate supply of single and multiple family housing.

Policy R-1.3 Land for Residential Development

Encourage residential development in all neighborhoods and districts in order to maximize the potential land available for development of housing and thereby positively influence housing affordability.

GOAL R-2: Promote safe, diverse, quality living environment.

Policy R-2.1 Context

Promote development of neighborhoods compatible with the context of their surroundings.

Policy R-2.2 Neighborhood Focus

Plan, design and build neighborhoods with a central focus area appropriate to the needs of each neighborhood. Focus areas may be but are not limited to neighborhood and community parks and gathering spaces.

Policy R-2.3 Connectivity

Design neighborhoods with walkable interconnected streets and development patterns. Neighborhoods will provide pedestrian, bike and vehicular linkages to adjacent schools, parks, commercial centers, additional activity centers and adjacent neighborhoods.

Policy R-2.4 Street Design

Design neighborhood streets appropriate to the scale and character of each neighborhood.

Policy R-2.5 Open Space

Design neighborhoods with adequate open space per the city's zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations.

Residential (Cont.)

Policy R-2.6 Stability

Conserve the character of stable, desired residential neighborhoods through neighborhood planning, neighborhood organizations, and supportive regulatory techniques.

Commercial

GOAL C-1: Promote quality commercial design throughout the city and in all appropriate activity centers.

Policy C-1.1 Scale of Commercial Centers

Assure that commercial centers are sized and scaled to reflect the center's context and the neighborhood or area it will serve.

Policy C-1.2 Access

Design all commercial areas to accommodate convenient access by pedestrians, bicycles and automobiles. All commercial areas, either in a center or along a corridor shall adhere to the city's access management standards.

Policy C-1.3 Design Standards

Assure that all commercial areas and activity centers comply with the city's design guidelines, in accord with their scale, density, context and location within the city.

Open Space

GOAL OS-1 Protect and enhance natural habitat/ecosystems (wildlife, wetlands, and riparian areas) within the developed landscape of Gulf Shores.

Policy OS-1.1 Protection and Enhancement

Preserve, protect, and enhance the resources and values of natural areas by directing development away from sensitive natural features -- such as wetlands, riparian areas and wildlife habitat. When it is not possible to direct development away from natural areas, these areas will be protected in the developed landscape.

Policy OS-1.2 Floodplains

Preserve and protect natural areas in the 100-year floodplain.

Policy OS-1.3 Open Lands System

Promote a system of publicly owned open lands to protect the integrity of wildlife habitat and conservation sites, protect corridors between natural areas, preserve outstanding

Open Space (cont.)

examples of Gulf Shores' diverse natural heritage, and provide a broad range of opportunities for educational, interpretive, and recreational programs to meet community needs.

Policy OS-1.4 Conservation Tools

Use a variety of means to protect open lands, conservation easements, and/or development rights for the purpose of defining and protecting community edges.

Policy OS-1.5 Access

Promote the provision and maintenance of access to public open land areas.

GOAL OS-2: Provide a variety of recreational opportunities in the form of an interconnected framework of open lands including parks, trails, community separators and natural areas.

Policy OS-2.1 Connections

Promote development of a permanent interconnected open space system to include streams, natural areas, open space corridors and major streets, there by linking neighborhoods, parks, activity centers, commercial centers, and schools.

Policy OS-2.2 Residential Open Space

Provide and promote development of functional open space and recreational areas at neighborhood and community wide levels for active and passive recreation.

Policy OS-2.3 Urban Public Space

Encourage a system of small pocket parks, public plazas, and sidewalk gathering places that include appropriate street furniture within the design of Downtown and all commercial and mixed use activity centers.

CONCLUSION

The development concept is designed to build on the spirit of the city, to build upon its traditions embodied in its downtown and in its institutions in combination with the physical advantages of the city's location and setting. The concept gives physical expression to the citywide vision and provides a general, overall framework for the next chapter of the Land Use Plan, which deals with the major components of city development: Green Infrastructure and activity centers. The compilation of Goals combines all the key policy elements of the plan in a single location.

III. MAJOR DEVELOPMENT COMPONENTS

Development patterns for Gulf Shores are composed of several major components. The primary focus areas are the city's major *activity centers*, which are nodes or concentrations of people, activity and development that should affect urban form, environmental quality and the transportation network in a positive way. *Neighborhoods* surround and support these activity centers, and should be designed, constructed and maintained to do so in ways that balance development with conservation. The overall, community-wide balance of population and consumption of land should be structured and compatible with the city's *Green Infrastructure*, which is composed of critical environmental resources.

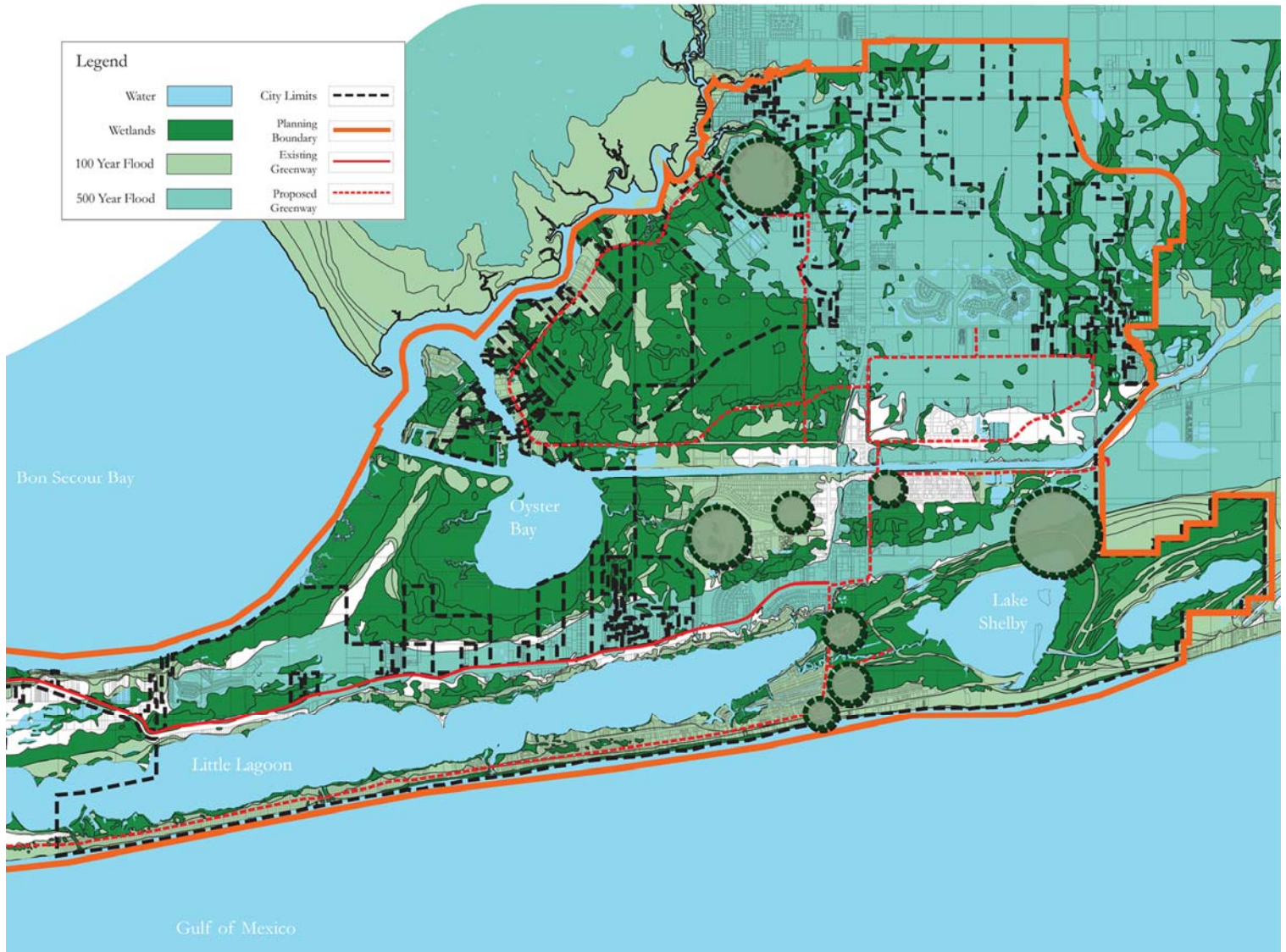
GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Gulf Shores and its surrounding area enjoy a wealth of natural resources critical to human well-being, whether the particular resource affects the economy, overall quality of life or the health and safety of residents. These resources vary from place to place around the community and its planning area, but they have one thing in common: if the city's green infrastructure is not respected—if its critical elements are allowed to be surrounded, diminished or depleted—the quality of life in Gulf Shores will suffer.

Natural resources have limits, and development decisions typically affect far more than the property's owner and those in the immediate neighborhood, because use, type and intensity of development ultimately affect the surroundings, and depending upon the approach to development, the land can present varying ranges of opportunities and hazards. For example, steeper slopes may provide opportunities for views, but they may also be difficult to build on. In combination with erodible soils, such slopes can be hazardous. As floodplains are filled in and built upon, flooding is shifted to other locations and little can be done there to eliminate the problem. Once cut, forests may take decades to grow, but they may return. However, wetlands filled and paved are likely gone forever, and extinct species cannot be replaced.

Consequently, public officials and citizens of Gulf Shores take seriously the quality of the natural environment. As a part of the planning process they have reviewed carefully the mutual impacts of development and natural resources on one another, for purposes of protection, production, health and safety, and parks and recreation. They have also considered how these natural resource areas together form a logical green infrastructure that may provide a framework or structuring system within which to organize, locate and interconnect urban development.

The first step in this process is to discern the pattern of the city's green infrastructure and its constituent parts—the resources, sites and areas that may be critical to the community. Open spaces—many of which at present may appear to be simply "undeveloped" lands—include many natural resources that are important to the



Green Infrastructure Map

community's character and well being. Others may appropriately be set aside for reasons of health and safety, fish and wildlife conservation, parks and recreation, and protection or preservation. The pattern illustrated on the Green Infrastructure map generally depicts these resources and places.



Local surface water resources include the Gulf of Mexico and its beaches, Bon Secour Bay, Oyster Bay, Little Lagoon, the Intracoastal Waterway, Lake Shelby and several small ponds and canals, all noted on the map in blue. The map also indicates wetlands in dark green, and floodplain areas in light green (those mapped are estimated by FEMA to have a 1% chance of flooding in any given year).

Gulf Shores contains several major parks and recreation areas, which are also indicated on the green infrastructure map with the dark green circles. Many of these incorporate or are located adjacent to some of the city's most important water resources. Others include significant areas of wetlands.

Green Infrastructure Policies

Conserve green infrastructure and landscape form

The city hosts rather diverse landscape features: the water's edge, dunes, coastal marshes, woodlands and the rural landscape of South Baldwin County around the edges of Gulf Shores are some of its greatest assets. Many of these are linear elements of the landscape that should be conserved. Development should be planned and arranged within the landscape with these areas clearly in mind.

Organize development to capitalize on critical open spaces

The city's most important natural resources and scenic locations should be reserved for public and semi-public open space greenways, community or regional parks, or simply conservation areas. These should be linked together insofar as possible into an overall open space system, and development should be planned and designed so that buildings look into these areas rather than back up to them.

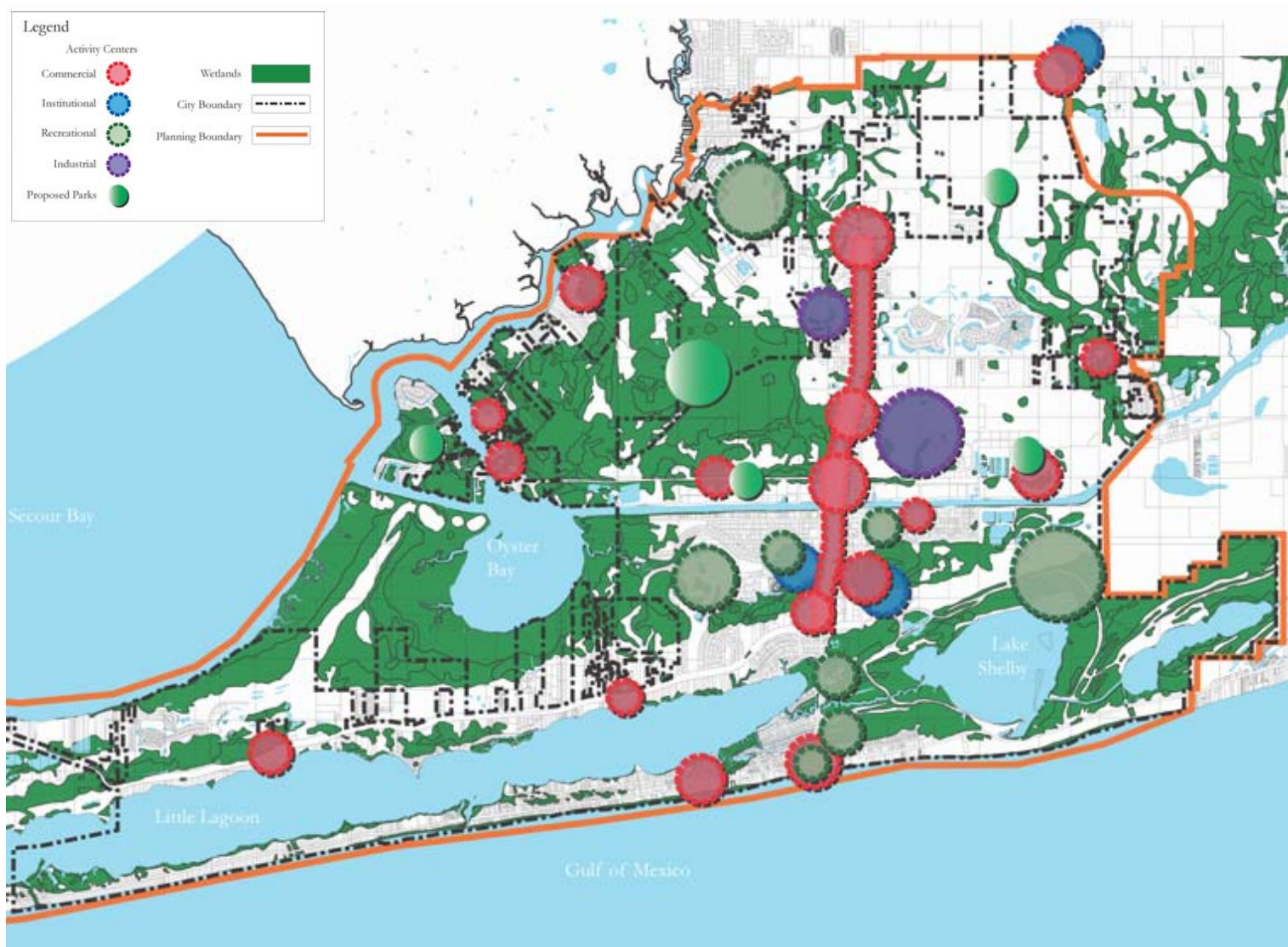
Ensure green infrastructure accessibility

The city's green infrastructure should be accessible. Parks and conservation areas with public access should be provided. Parks and open spaces should accommodate both active and passive recreation uses. Walking trails, play areas, and picnic facilities should be staple components of recreation parks.

GATEWAYS, ACTIVITY CENTERS AND CORRIDORS

Significant nodes or concentrations of people, activity and development are designated in this plan as *Activity Centers*. The intent is that each of these be located, planned and designed to relate to, support and positively affect urban form, environmental quality, adjacent residential neighborhoods and the transportation network in a positive way. Gulf Shores' activity centers and corridors come in a variety of types and sizes, but most display at least several of the following characteristics:

- Anchor or focus of activity: *Regardless of its type, every center or corridor contains some activity or function for which it is primarily and integrally known in the region, community or neighborhood, as appropriate.*
- Compact, densely developed core: *There is a relatively high density of development of the types essential to the character of the place, ideally with greater density of use toward the center and less toward the edges.*



Activity Centers and Corridors Map

- **Internal vehicular circulation:** *Once having arrived by vehicle at most any location within a center or along a corridor, a motorist may easily access most any other location within the center or along the corridor on the same side of a major street without having to re-enter that street.*
- **Pedestrian and bicycle accessibility:** *The center is readily accessible by pedestrians and cyclists from surrounding areas without exertion of undue effort or extraordinary traffic-avoidance abilities.*
- **Pedestrian oriented (overall):** *The center demonstrates through pedestrian density throughout that it was planned and designed with the overall needs of pedestrians given priority over those of motorists and automobiles.*

- Positive sense of place: *The average person has a good feeling about the overall character of the center or corridor—overall image of the place and its relation to the surrounding environment, feelings of safety, and sense of arrival and departure.*
- Vehicular accessibility: *The center or corridor is readily accessible by motor vehicle to any licensed driver.*
- Visual coherence: *The average person senses that things fit together—signage, landscaping, the way the parking supports getting to one’s destination, the way most of the buildings seem to relate to one another.*
- Well-defined edge: *It is clear to most everyone where the center or corridor begins and ends without having to resort to walls or signs.*

There are several activity center types, shown in the Activity Centers and Corridors Map, provided for by this plan. Each should be developed in accord with principles appropriate for center location, size and type.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Downtown Gulf Shores</i> • <i>Gulf Place and the Beach</i> • <i>Gateways and Image Corridors</i> • <i>Community Commercial Centers</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Neighborhood Centers</i> • <i>Employment Support Centers</i> • <i>Institutional Support Centers</i> • <i>Major Recreation Centers</i>
--	---

Citywide Activity Center Policies

Preserve and enhance the city’s open space system

All activity centers should be carefully planned, organized and placed appropriately within the city’s green infrastructure. They should be strategically placed away from the most valuable or threatened natural resources. The natural environment should continue to be valued as an important ingredient of all the city’s activity centers, which in turn should be designed to conserve and utilize natural systems to assist in filtering stormwater drainage.

Design each activity center to relate to its context

Each activity center should have an appropriate scale and mix of uses defined by its type and the population it serves—regional, citywide or neighborhood. Each of these centers should be integrated into the community, with appropriate connections and transitions made to adjacent land uses.

Streets and service drives should be located and designed appropriate to the users, mindful of the impact on roadway capacity and safety. Vehicular access should be designed to allow motorists access to adjacent centers and neighborhoods, yet discourage through traffic while still accommodating service access and delivery.

Create discernable, compact activity centers

Each activity center should be planned and designed to have a sense of identity and place, distinguishable from one center to the next—perhaps by including a unique feature or activity. Activity centers should be compact and densely developed. Their edges should be well defined. Each center, regardless of scale, should look and feel as if it has been designed, or at least considered, as a whole, in context with its surroundings. Continuity of major design elements, such as building setbacks, height, scale, materials, landscaping and signage should be evident. Differences should not be abrupt and overwhelming, but rather provide interest and diversity.

Design each activity center to maximize accessibility

Design can greatly influence the number of people willing to walk or ride as an alternative to driving. Complete streets and other appropriate linkages between residential and nonresidential uses should be provided. Pedestrians and vehicles should be separated from one another insofar as practicable, with the length of pedestrian crossings of parking areas kept to a minimum. Human scale should be created through building mass and form, as well as scale and detail. Building location, setbacks and orientation should enhance pedestrian comfort, as should lighting and landscape design.

Downtown Gulf Shores

Downtown, located mostly along the western side of Highway 59 south of the ICW, is the most complex and complete of the city's activity centers, despite its relatively modest scale. A well-integrated mixed-use center that has evolved steadily over the past few decades, it continues to support the mission and vision of the city and, as a result, remains the symbolic heart of the community and of city government.

Downtown Gulf Shores continues to attract public and private sector investment and should stress good design in combination with a commitment that downtown should continue to meet essential civic needs first and foremost. Downtown is a high priority for Gulf Shores, and the key to its continued success will to remain attentive to all factors of downtown's success together.

One of the strong sentiments expressed during the planning process is that the city's traditional core should remain its symbolic heart and a major focus of community energy and activity. The following are general policies toward the physical conditions supportive of such a vision. Fully fleshed out, this framework can help citizens, merchants, investors and government officials make decisions in support of downtown.

Promote and maintain an attractive image

- *Budget for, provide and maintain high quality public facilities.*
- *Provide and maintain an appropriate appearance and use of open, vacant and unimproved properties.*
- *Encourage the use of attractive and effective commercial displays and signs.*

- *Plan for and implement a community wayfinding system centered on downtown.*

Support and maintain a vital retail, service, institutional and civic environment

- *Assemble an appropriate and mutually supportive mix and pattern of uses, businesses and activities.*
- *Build and promote a desirable image of downtown and its access corridors.*

Make downtown easily accessible

- *Maintain and support legible traffic patterns for safe and efficient travel through downtown and throughout the city.*
- *Minimize conflicts between motor vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians to enhance the safety and efficiency of the street system.*
- *Provide adequate, clearly visible downtown area parking facilities and adequate loading zones for service and delivery vehicles.*
- *Provide safe sidewalks and other pedestrianways that are convenient for pedestrians to keep them away from their cars as long as possible during each trip.*

Downtown Gulf Shores should be a model of success for the entire city. Every public decision and action should be part of an attempt to solve existing problems—and to avoid causing new problems at the same time. This will require an overall approach to planning and plan implementation for downtown: everyone involved must focus on a comprehensive view of how downtown supports—and is supported by—the whole community.

Downtown is the city’s primary mixed-use activity center. It is the traditional heart of the community and should be treated with respect due its role and position in the community. It should have uses and activities compatible with its civic importance and distinction as the most pedestrian-friendly location in the city. Planning and design should incorporate the following strategies.

- *Retail uses should be small in scale, and placed at street level along Highway 59; office and service uses should be on the side streets; residential uses should be placed in upper stories as appropriate.*
- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger composition of downtown.*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate in similar scale, height and configuration.*

Downtown Gulf Shores

Typical Appropriate Uses

- Residential:
 - Adjacent (horizontal)
 - Integrated (vertical)
 - Diverse type and ownership
- Retail commercial
- Office / service commercial
- Hospitality:
 - Restaurant
- Institutional/Civic
- Passive recreational

General Development Principles

- Positive sense of place
- Visual coherence
- Compact, dense core
- Intensive mixed use
- Civic spaces
- Pedestrian oriented
- Pedestrian accessible
- Internal vehicular circulation
- Intense center of activity
- Well-defined edges

General Design Guidelines

- Required build-to lines
- Street trees
- No parking lots fronting sidewalks
- No drive-in or drive-through uses
- Density decreases to edges

- *To provide variety and human scale, larger buildings should be divided into separate volumes.*
- *Building heights typically should not exceed four or five stories.*
- *Buildings should be placed at the back of the sidewalk, with all off-street parking situated to the sides and rear.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function. Trees should complement adjacent buildings and shade the sidewalks.*
- *Buildings should frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
- *Street intersections are important, and deserve taller structures. Parking, loading or service functions should not be located at an intersection.*
- *Building-mounted signs, including blade signs should be encouraged. Freestanding signs are less appropriate in a pedestrian-oriented downtown, but if permitted should be monument type or otherwise lesser in height than highway-oriented signage.*

Gulf Place and the Beach

The intersection of Beach Boulevard and Highway 59 is the city's traditional center of beach-oriented tourism and its primary image in the minds of many visitors. It should be safe, comfortable, shaded,

calm, connected and interesting. This is not simply a matter of aesthetics; the economy of the city is tightly linked to tourism and its beach environment. Its image is critical to remaining competitive. Gulf Shores intends to set itself apart in a positive manner from its neighbors and further ensure marketability and prosperity that comes from attracting visitors, residents and investors.



Gulf Place and the Beach

Typical Appropriate Uses

- Tourist retail commercial
- Hospitality:
 - Hotels
 - Restaurants
- Residential:
 - Adjacent only
- Institutional/Civic

General Development Principles

- Positive sense of place
- Visual coherence
- Pedestrian oriented (overall)
- Pedestrian accessibility
- Internal vehicular circulation
- Intense center of activity
- Well-defined edges

General Design Guidelines

- Focus on beach oriented tourism
- Required build-to line
- Parking inside or to the rear
- Street trees
- Density decreases to edges

Development planning and design should incorporate the following strategies, which serve to reinforce the design recommendations of the Envision Gulf Shores Plan, to assure that Gulf Place will offer a positive image and experience to visitors and residents alike:

- *The center and its components should provide a strong sense of place derived from the context of the beach and the Gulf.*
- *A cohesive and coordinated land use pattern for Gulf Place, its entrance corridors from the north and from East and*

West Beach, and Second Avenue should be planned, designed and implemented.

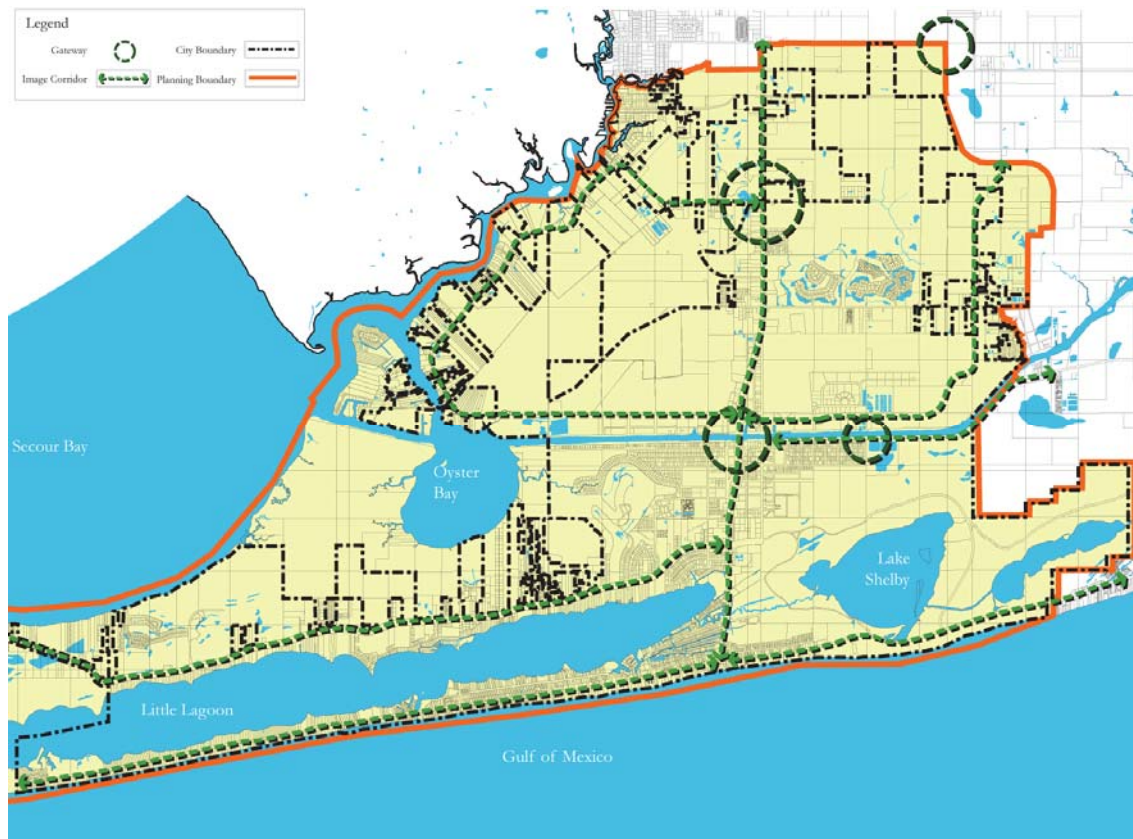
- *Commercial development should focus on the key pedestrian streets, where they can capitalize on visibility and walk-in trade. Scattered or strip patterns of commercial development around Gulf Place and the beach should be strongly discouraged.*
- *All buildings should address the street and adjacent pedestrian areas.*
- *Gulf Place and adjacent commercial and mixed use areas along the beach should be easily accessible to adjacent beach residential areas.*
- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition. Adjacent buildings should relate in scale, height and configuration.*
- *To provide human scale, larger buildings should be divided into separate volumes horizontally and vertically.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function. Trees should complement adjacent buildings and shade the sidewalks.*
- *Buildings should frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
- *Pedestrian and bicycle circulation, including pedestrian access to the beach, should be integral to the experience, provided through street and site design, and should be connected to the citywide system of sidewalks, trails and bicycle paths and lanes.*
- *Building-mounted signs, including blade signs should be encouraged. Freestanding signs are less appropriate in a pedestrian-oriented areas, but if permitted should be monument type or otherwise lesser in height than highway-oriented signage.*

Gateways and Image Corridors

The city's major streets are gateways to its activity centers and neighborhoods, and consequently they convey a lasting image to residents, business and industry, and passersby. They should be safe, comfortable, shaded, calm, connected and interesting. This is not simply a matter of aesthetics; the economy of the city is tightly linked to its physical character, and its image must be enhanced to remain competitive.

Gulf Shores enjoys major access from the north and east, and its gateways and entrance corridors form a major part of the image of the city. They should be treated as scarce assets to be enhanced. By taking appropriate care with development along these corridors and adjacent to its major gateways, Gulf Shores intends to set itself apart in a positive manner from its neighbors and further insure marketability and prosperity from attracting visitors, residents and investors.

Each gateway to Gulf Shores, its neighborhoods, activity centers and commercial corridors should provide a welcoming introduction to the city that reflects the best of the particular characteristics of its setting. Development planning and design should incorporate the following strategies to assure that Gulf Shores will offer a positive image by providing easily recognizable transitions from outside to inside the city:



Gateways and Image Corridors Map

- *A cohesive and coordinated land use pattern for each of the city's entrance corridors and gateways should be planned, designed and implemented.*
- *Sense of place should be enhanced with strong, well-designed development that is visible from the road corridor. Appropriate lighting and tree plantings should be used at gateways and along image corridors.*

Gateways and Image Corridors

Typical Appropriate Uses

- Retail commercial
- Office or service commercial
- Residential:
Adjacent (horizontal)

General Development Principles

- Positive sense of place
- Visual coherence
- Pedestrian accessibility
- Internal vehicular circulation
- Well-defined edges

General Design Guidelines

- Street trees
- Parking to side or rear
- Density decreases to edges
- Transition to adjacent housing

- *Scattered or strip patterns of commercial development should be phased out over time.*
- *Retail and other non-residential uses should address the major street. Commerce should be easily accessible to adjacent residential areas.*
- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the area in which it is located. Adjacent buildings should relate in scale, height and configuration.*
- *To provide human scale, larger buildings should be broken down into separate volumes, both horizontally and vertically.*

- *Buildings should face and be relatively close to the street, with most off-street parking located behind and/or beside buildings.*
- *Development should be planned and designed to maximize street frontage of buildings and minimize street frontage taken up by parking lots.*
- *Buildings should frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
- *Pedestrian and bicycle circulation should be an integral part of the experience, provided through street and site design, and should be connected to the citywide system of sidewalks, trails and bicycle paths and lanes.*
- *When possible, direct arterial street access should be limited. Parking lots of adjacent business along the same side of an arterial or collector street should be physically and legally accessible to one another without having to re-enter the street.*
- *Sign types should be appropriate to their context. In denser, pedestrian-friendly areas, building signs should be encouraged. In more vehicle-oriented locations, such as along Highway 59, freestanding signs are appropriate, though their size and height should be carefully managed to avoid visual confusion.*



Community Commercial Centers

Community-scale commercial areas have typically been developed along Highway 59, often at intersections, with large areas devoted to parking. While these centers are oriented to the customer traveling by auto, pedestrian activity is appropriate and should be a part of redevelopment, reinvestment, or infill development plans. Infill development should be placed at the street edge to partially screen the parking lots and provide human scale for pedestrians.

Typical appropriate uses would include a grocery store, supporting retail and service commercial, office, restaurant and institutional uses. Residential uses should be nearby and easily accessible to these centers, which in turn should present a positive face to adjacent neighborhoods as well as to the major street. Planning and design should incorporate the following strategies.

- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger composition of the area within which it is located.*

Community Commercial Centers

Typical Appropriate Uses

- Retail commercial
- Office or service commercial
- Hospitality:
 - Restaurant
- Residential:
 - Adjacent
 - Diverse type and ownership
- Institutional/Civic

General Development Principles

- Positive sense of place
- Visual coherence
- Pedestrian oriented (overall)
- Pedestrian accessibility
- Internal vehicular circulation
- Intense center of activity
- Well-defined edges

General Design Guidelines

- Stores serving the community
- Required building line
- Parking in the rear or to the side
- Street trees
- Density decreases to edges

- *Adjacent buildings should relate in scale, height and configuration.*
- *To provide variety and human scale, larger buildings should be divided into separate volumes, both horizontally and vertically.*
- *Building heights should not exceed two stories.*
- *Buildings should be close to the street, with off-street parking located behind or to the side.*
- *At street intersections especially, the main building should be placed right up next to the corner. Parking, loading or service should not be located adjacent to an intersection.*
- *Parking lots on adjacent properties should be physically interconnected.*
- *Parking lots should be planned and designed with primary access and circulation traffic located toward the outside edge rather than the edge closest to the buildings. Access to corner lots should be located as far from the intersection as possible.*
- *To maximize the street frontage of buildings and minimize the street frontage of parking lots, buildings should be sited so that the long side fronts the street.*
- *Buildings should frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*

- *Pedestrian and bicycle circulation should be an integral part of the experience, provided for in street and site design, and should be connected to the citywide system of sidewalks, trails and bicycle paths and lanes.*
- *Sign types should be appropriate to their context. In denser, pedestrian-friendly areas, building signs should be encouraged. In more vehicle-oriented locations, such as along Highway 59, freestanding signs are appropriate, though their size and height should be carefully managed to avoid visual confusion.*

Neighborhood Centers

Typical Appropriate Uses

- Retail commercial
- Office or service commercial
- Hospitality:
 - Restaurant
- Residential:
 - Adjacent
- Small Institutional/Civic

General Development Principles

- Positive sense of place
- Visual coherence
- Pedestrian oriented (overall)
- Pedestrian accessibility
- Internal vehicular circulation
- Intense center of activity
- Well-defined edges

General Design Guidelines

- Stores serving the neighborhoods
- Required building line
- One or two stories
- Parking in the rear or to the side
- No drive-ins or drive-throughs
- Street trees
- Density decreases to edges
- Greenway connections

Neighborhood Centers

Existing and proposed neighborhood centers are dispersed throughout the city, located along County Roads 4 and 6 (in northwest Gulf Shores), Fort Morgan Road, East Canal Drive, and Cotton Creek Drive. These should meet the daily “convenience” goods and service needs of residents in perhaps two or three immediately adjacent neighborhoods. It may be anchored by a small grocery or drug store and could also include a variety of smaller scale shops, a neighborhood park and perhaps small institutional uses such as a fire station. The center would serve as a social and recreational focal point for the neighborhoods and should be planned,

designed and constructed as such. Access generally by local and collector streets should also provide walking and bicycling connections.

Typical appropriate uses might include a grocery store, supporting retail and service commercial, office, restaurant and institutional uses. Residential uses should be close by and easily accessible to these centers, which in turn should present a positive face to adjacent neighborhoods. Development planning and design should incorporate the following strategies.

- *Retail uses should take precedence over other types of uses in neighborhood centers by being placed at street level and in the most visible and strategic locations. Residential uses should be to the rear or in upper stories. Office uses may be placed along the street, to the rear or in upper stories, but should not take up street frontage more advantageous for retail uses.*
- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger composition of the area within which it is located.*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate in scale, height and configuration.*
- *For human scale, larger buildings should be broken down into separate volumes, horizontally and vertically.*
- *Building heights should not exceed two stories.*
- *Buildings should be close to the street, with off-street parking located behind and/or beside buildings. At street intersections especially, the main building should be placed right up next to the corner. Parking, loading or service should not be located at an intersection.*
- *To maximize the street frontage of buildings and minimize the street frontage of parking lots, buildings should be sited so that the long side fronts the street.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function. Trees should complement adjacent buildings and shade the sidewalks.*
- *Buildings should frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
- *Pedestrian and bicycle circulation should be an integral part of the experience, provided for in street and site design, and should be connected to the citywide system of sidewalks, trails and bicycle paths and lanes.*
- *Building-mounted signs, including blade signs should be encouraged. Freestanding signs are less appropriate in a pedestrian-oriented areas, but if permitted should be monument type or otherwise lesser in height than highway-oriented signage.*

Employment Support Centers

These centers have developed historically off of Highway 59 but adjacent to commercial areas along the corridor. They are dominated by office, technology, light industrial and other job-generating land uses but contain relatively few retail and service uses. Each should convey the image of Gulf Shores as an accessible, desirable community in which to live, work and invest. This image should be strengthened by imparting a strong sense of community, and especially for those who work or live near them. It is also important to maintain physical accessibility between these areas and the rest of the city. Development planning and design should incorporate the following strategies.

Employment Support Centers

Typical Appropriate Uses

- Light industrial
- Warehouse and distribution
- Wholesale commercial
- Service commercial—limited
- Support office and services

General Development Principles

- Positive sense of place
- Visual coherence
- Compact, dense core
- Pedestrian accessible
- Internal vehicular circulation
- Intense center of activity
- Well-defined edges

General Design Guidelines

- Street trees
- Landscape buffers at edges

- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the center and of the area in which it is located.*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate in similar scale, height and configuration.*
- *Street intersections are important, and deserve taller structures located near the property frontage. Parking, loading or service functions should not be located at an intersection.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function.*
- *Buildings should face the street, with off-street parking located behind and/or beside buildings.*
- *Pedestrian and bicycle circulation should be integral to the experience, provided through street and site design, and should be connected to the citywide system of sidewalks, trails and bicycle paths and lanes.*
- *An appropriate transition should be made between the employment center and adjacent centers and residential neighborhoods.*
- *Sign types should be appropriate to their context. In denser, pedestrian-friendly areas, building signs should be encouraged. In more vehicle-oriented locations, such as along Highway 59, freestanding signs are appropriate, though their size and height should be carefully managed to avoid visual confusion.*

Institutional Support Centers

These centers are dominated by government, educational, medical and civic uses, and contain relatively few other uses except those that may be accessory to the primary uses. Currently, downtown serves as Gulf Shores' primary institutional support center. Developing institutional support centers should convey the image of Gulf Shores as an

accessible, desirable community in which to live, work and invest. This image should be strengthened by a strong sense of community relationship, especially for those people who work or live near them. It is also important to maintain physical accessibility between these areas and the rest of the city. Development planning and design should incorporate the following strategies.

- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the center and of the area in which it is located.*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate in scale, height and configuration.*
- *At street intersections, the main building should be close to the corner. Parking, loading or service should not be located at or near the intersection.*
- *To provide human scale, larger buildings should be broken down into separate volumes.*
- *An appropriate transition should be made between the center and adjacent uses, especially residential neighborhoods.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function. Institutional support center streets should have trees that complement the adjacent buildings and shade the sidewalks.*
- *Off-street parking should be placed behind and/or beside buildings.*
- *Pedestrian and bicycle circulation should be an integral part of the experience, provided for in street and site design, and should be connected to the citywide system of sidewalks, trails and bicycle paths and lanes.*
- *The buildings should frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
- *Sign types should be appropriate to their context. In denser, pedestrian-friendly areas, building signs should be encouraged. In more vehicle-oriented locations, such as along Highway 59, freestanding signs are appropriate, though their size and height should be carefully managed to avoid visual confusion.*

Institutional Support Centers

Typical Appropriate Uses

- Governmental buildings
- Medical centers
- High schools
- Colleges
- Civic centers
- Support services

General Development Principles

- Positive sense of place
- Visual coherence
- Compact, dense core
- Pedestrian accessible
- Internal vehicular circulation
- Intense center of activity
- Well-defined edges

General Design Guidelines

- Street trees
- Landscape buffers at edges

Major Recreational Centers

Large recreational centers are mostly open space but often contain significant structures. They are often somewhat isolated from neighborhoods due to the need for large spaces. This often renders them inaccessible except by automobile, so access and parking are critical. As with all other parts of the community, it is especially important for the city's major recreation centers to help convey an image of Gulf Shores as an accessible, desirable community in which to live, work and invest. This image should be

strengthened by imparting a strong sense of community to these centers, and especially for those who live near them. It is also important to maintain physical accessibility between these areas and the rest of the city, including by means of bicycle and pedestrian access and circulation.

Public parks and open spaces should be planned and designed to provide abundant shade and seating areas for respite during hot summer months. All park and open space elements should be designed with comfort and cooling clearly in mind. Seating areas at ball fields should be organized beneath mature shade trees. Playgrounds should be nestled beneath large tree canopies to provide shade for children and their parents. When natural tree canopies are not part of the existing site, new shade trees should be added for comfort. Planning and design should incorporate the following strategies.

Major Park / Recreation Centers

Typical Appropriate Uses

- Parks
- Swimming pools
- Recreation centers
- Sports fields
- Fishing
- Picnic and other passive uses
- Trails

General Development Principles

- Positive sense of place
- Visual coherence
- Pedestrian accessible
- Internal vehicular circulation
- Intense center of activity
- Well-defined edges

General Design Guidelines

- Street trees
- Overall landscape concept
- Transition to adjacent uses

- *Parks and recreation centers should form part of the larger physical composition of the area in which they are located, and capitalize upon and relate to the city's green infrastructure.*
- *Adjacent buildings and structures should relate in scale, height and configuration.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function. Trees should complement adjacent buildings and shade the sidewalks.*
- *Parking lots should be planned and designed with primary access and circulation traffic located toward the outside edge rather than the edge closest to the buildings or sports fields.*
- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the center, provided in street and site design. Pedestrians should not be forced to walk through parking lots and across driveways and traffic to reach their destinations.*

- *An appropriate transition should be made between the park or recreation center and adjacent activity centers and residential neighborhoods.*
- *Physical accessibility should be maintained between park and recreation facilities and the rest of the city, including by means of bicycle and pedestrian access and circulation.*



NEIGHBORHOODS

Neighborhoods, embraced by the city's green infrastructure, together with citywide open space and circulation systems, and the various activity centers, form the city. Among the city's neighborhoods, a range of housing types and price levels should bring together a diversity of people into daily interaction, strengthening the personal and civic bonds that are essential to Gulf Shores. Good neighborhoods place an emphasis on community, livability, appearance, diversity, accessibility, convenience and safety for all residents. To achieve this, the most successful neighborhoods generally exhibit characteristics that are typically missing from most conventional subdivisions as they have been developed over the past few decades.

The following are several principles intended to guide planning and design for all Gulf Shores neighborhoods.

Preserve and enhance the citywide open space system

Neighborhoods should be planned and organized within and in relation to the city's green infrastructure. A neighborhood designed to conserve its natural systems requires less capital investment for earthwork, clearing and drainage, and results in a healthy, appealing community. Neighborhoods should be located in appropriate areas, sensitively sited in relation to or strategically placed away from the most valuable or threatened natural resources.



The illusion has been that bigger lots mean more trees and green space. Conservation subdivision techniques, through which a neighborhood is designed to conserve its natural systems and thereby require less capital investment for earthwork, clearing and drainage, streets and utilities, can add to a healthy, appealing community. Such techniques may be used to maintain allowable gross densities without negatively affecting the natural environment, which should be an important neighborhood ingredient. This technique is highly encouraged for low and medium density residential developments on properties where wetlands and other natural conditions need to be protected, although it can also be used in higher density residential developments.

Design each neighborhood with community relationships in mind

The scale and density of a neighborhood should reflect its location in the community. A neighborhood focal point should also be designed with the location in mind. The scale, mix of housing types and sizes, and type of open space should be integrated into the neighborhood and fit the surroundings. More dense development should be focused

toward commercial centers and corridors, if nearby, providing a logical and comfortable transition between those non-residential areas and single family neighborhoods. This also allows higher density residential neighborhoods to take advantage of the road, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure provided in more central locations. Residential density should decrease in locations further away from activity centers.

Design the place for children and retirees

Places for children to play safely—and for older citizens to get about on foot—should be a staple item of all neighborhoods. Circulation and open spaces add to the value of property and help to create a more livable community. Each neighborhood should have at least one special gathering place, such as a neighborhood green, near its center. Such spaces should have their long side along a street or otherwise oriented to maximize views from adjacent residences and public areas.

Create a focus appropriate to the needs of the neighborhood

A neighborhood focal point of a type and size appropriate to the needs of residents should be included to add a sense of place to the neighborhood—for example, a park or usable community facility or open space. The focal point should be pedestrian oriented and provide for easy vehicular access, but there should also be places for neighbors to venture out into the public realm without their vehicles. These focal points may be open spaces designed for passive or active recreational uses. Waterfront residential developments should include open spaces that provide residents with access or views to the water. Prototypical park designs are shown on page 39 of this document.

Design the neighborhood with walkable, interconnected streets

Sidewalks should provide the backbone of the pedestrian system. The pedestrian network can be greatly improved, and walking distance and infrastructure costs substantially reduced, through the use of mid-block connections and cul-de-sac linkages, as well as trails within greenways or other open space areas. Creating interconnected neighborhood streets and providing alternate routes will help to diffuse automobile traffic, thus lowering traffic volumes on many city streets. Neighborhood sidewalks, trails and paths should connect to the pedestrian and bicycle routes serving the community wherever possible.

Design streets appropriate to the scale and character of the neighborhood

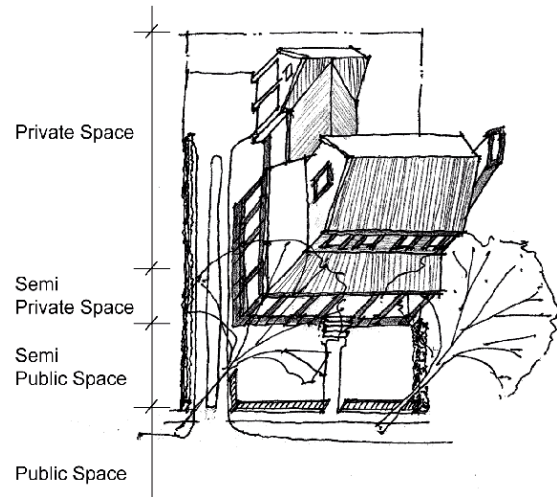
Neighborhood streets should be designed to enhance the neighborhood and to positively influence driver behavior. They should be relatively narrow and include sidewalks, street trees, front porches and architecture that embrace the street. Instead of a single standard, the type of adjacent uses, the location of the street within the community, the desired carrying capacity and vehicle speed should be the determining factors in neighborhood street width and design. In some cases, larger streets may be needed to accommodate greater amounts of traffic, in accordance with the city's transportation plan. Similarly, additional facilities, such as bicycle lanes or multi-use paths paralleling a street, may be required where called for in city plans or street details. Neighborhood

streets should be calmed by providing an overhead canopy of street trees, which gives the neighborhood a comfortable setting and a sense of spatial enclosure that creates an environment where drivers realize that driving fast or aggressively is inappropriate.

Neighborhood Planning and Design Criteria

- *Identify the essential features of green infrastructure and landscape form and plan for their interconnection as part of a larger open space network. Sensitive environmental features should be preserved within accessible, common open spaces.*
- *Determine and provide appropriate public uses, greenways, neighborhood parks and community parks.*
- *Link green infrastructure and landscape elements together into open space systems that organize development.*
- *Plan and design residential lots to front on and look into open spaces, rather than back up to them. The overall development value will generally increase, despite the cost of placing a few single-loaded streets along open spaces.*
- *Incorporate a variety of lot sizes within subdivisions that are generally in keeping with the intended density of the area. This ensures architectural diversity and can also support the provision of more affordable housing within each emerging neighborhood.*
- *Plan and design neighborhood-scale commercial, civic and open spaces to meet the daily needs of resident and to provide a focal point or gateway to the neighborhood.*
- *Avoid use of the conventional strip commercial shopping center model adjacent to neighborhoods—choose instead a walkable, pedestrian-oriented neighborhood center with attractive and enduring architecture that will add value to the neighborhood and community overall.*
- *Retain native vegetation, wetlands, habitats, woodlands and other natural features wherever possible. These areas can be preserved through conservation easements and can be included in common areas serving the neighborhood.*
- *Incorporate existing trees and shrubs into the streetscape by carefully planning alignments and grades.*
- *Require internal vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle connections within development areas and between adjacent land uses.*
- *Provide internal connections (roads, pathways, open space, etc.), between adjacent land uses, such as residential subdivisions or commercial developments, to serve as a secondary means of emergency access, encourage more sense of community, and minimize local traffic on major roads.*
- *Make all neighborhood centers pedestrian oriented with easy vehicular and pedestrian access from within the neighborhood.*
- *Fully integrate a neighborhood focal element into its surroundings so that buffers are not necessary.*

- *The areas around a center may contain higher density housing and a higher concentration of residents.*
- *Plan and design neighborhood streets, yards and building fronts to create a comfortable transition between all four degrees of community and privacy: public, semi-public, semi-private and private.*
- *Encourage and allow for porches and courtyards—they provide shelter, seating places, and a comfortable transition from the public street to the private dwelling and are a welcoming gesture to visitors.*
- *Clearly distinguish the front door of the primary dwelling space, as the primary welcoming feature of each residence.*
- *Foundation walls and raised entrances provide the perception of a strong, solid foundation, a sense of durability, strength, and importance. The home appears to be sitting on a platform, as an important structure, separated from the street level.*
- *Locate garages away from all community areas. Set the garage back from the main façade of the home—they are the most utilitarian space and do little to foster community interaction.*



Transition from the public space of the street to the private space of the home

CONCLUSION

Gulf Shores intends to strategically focus population concentrations around commercial and employment centers, supported by residential neighborhoods and interspersed with and structured by green corridors, all interconnected by a variety of accessibility options intended to require less automobile travel, provide better opportunities for future transit, and decrease adverse environmental effects.

IV. THE USE OF LAND

The functional organization of the city has been carefully considered throughout the planning process. The major land use recommendations and the key locations throughout Gulf Shores that are planned for major investment result from analysis of environmental, physical and economic conditions, combined with the vision for Gulf Shores and the principles described and illustrated in the Citywide Development Concept and outlined in the Major Development Components of Chapter III.

The map of Future Land Use illustrates how different parts of the community should function and relate to one another—in other words, the overall physical structure of the city. The map portrays a pattern of various activity centers by type, their interrelations with each other and with the city's neighborhoods. These centers and interconnections between them are critical to integrating the city's land use, transportation, community facilities and major infrastructure. Building on this structure, Gulf Shores intends to continue to grow and develop as a community where public life is encouraged and quality urban design is maintained.

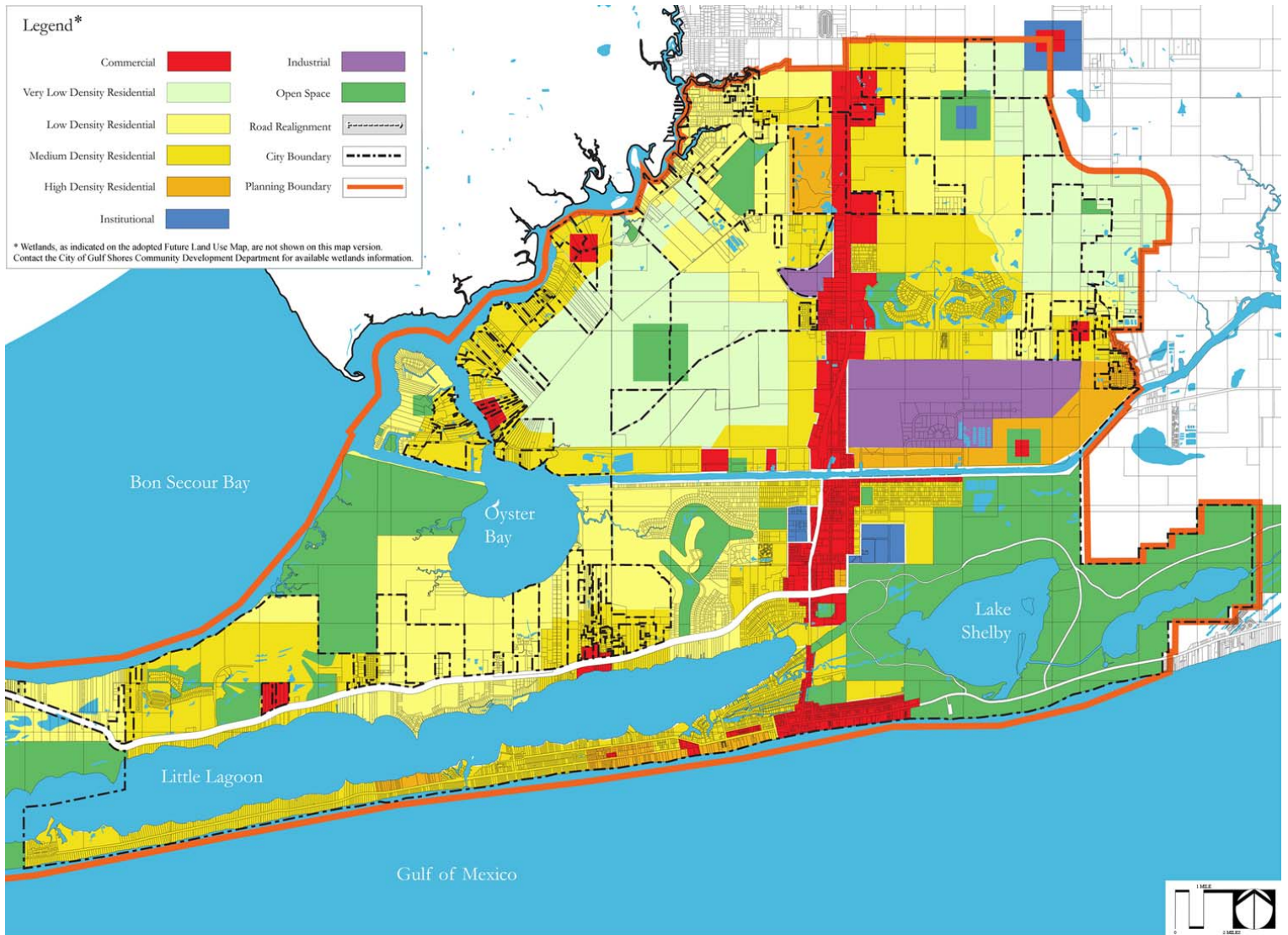
MAJOR DEVELOPMENT THEMES

Gulf Shores has recast its visions and the wide range of community values expressed during the Town Meeting and planning work sessions into a Future Land Use map to help guide the growth, development and conservation of the city. That map projects an arrangement of land uses, in recognition of the ways in which land is presently used and the essential pattern of the city's green infrastructure. The essential *functions* of the city are presented as they are and as they are planned to be. The map shows areas that may be generally suited to development and where sensitive environmental features may limit development capability. The map is intended to serve several related functions:

- *Avoid and resolve land use conflicts*
- *Identify and sustain desirable land use patterns*
- *Assist in forecasting infrastructure needs*
- *Provide a foundation for zoning*

The land use categories indicated on the Future Land Use map *should not be viewed as equivalent to zoning districts*, but rather as general guidelines indicating desirable land use patterns for Gulf Shores. It should be noted that designation of land uses on the map should not be interpreted to propose, approve, deny nor preclude any particular action without full consideration of all policies, principles, standards or intentions expressed in this plan document and its implementing regulations. Site considerations relating to green infrastructure, plus topography, geology, soils, habitats, wetlands, and flood prone areas will be of major importance when locating any particular new development and planning and designing its uses and density. These realities, plus attitudes toward development on the part of public officials, other agencies, area

residents, property owners and developers will play a large part in making decisions regarding appropriate development location and design. Similarly, the presence of adequate streets as well as schools, parks and other community facilities should be assured before making any significant development proposals or decisions. It should also be noted that the original maps pertaining to this plan are maintained on the city’s digital network.



Future Land Use Map

It is important to consider how the city’s various activity centers should be planned and designed in relation to the city’s *neighborhoods*—where people live and come together away from work and commerce to form a community with one another. The Gulf Shores Land Use Plan is based on the community’s own evaluation of its assets and opportunities. It is organized into five major policy themes to recognize and capitalize on those assets and opportunities for the community at large.

I. Protect Gulf Shores' Green Infrastructure

Gulf Shores intends to protect, preserve and enhance important and fragile ecosystems within developed portions of the city through encouragement of conservation subdivision, environmental regulations, and acquisition where desirable for community purposes. It will strive to use its natural and open lands for parks and for passive and active recreation.

II. Build a City of Neighborhoods Supported by Activity Centers

Gulf Shores intends to grow by replicating and building upon the best characteristics of its own and other traditional coastal neighborhoods in selected locations around the city. Gulf Shores envisions its population growth living in neighborhoods that focus upon and complement the city's green infrastructure that reflects the human scale and pedestrian orientation of the community. Generally, this means that Gulf Shores intends to:

- *Support, maintain and enhance Downtown Gulf Shores as the heart of the city.*
- *Organize residential development into true neighborhoods.*
- *Encourage the development of additional civic, educational, recreational, and commercial functions in strategic locations areas around the city.*
- *Focus citywide and regional commerce into concentrated, highly accessible activity centers and corridors served by its highest-capacity arterial roadways.*
- *Focus industry, office uses and recreational and institutional support services into activity centers served by arterial and collector streets.*

III. Maintain and Enhance Community Character

Gulf Shores intends to conserve and enhance its special qualities, including downtown, Gulf Place, neighborhoods, pedestrian scale, and the best of its existing streets and parks and recreation areas. Maintaining and enhancing the physical qualities of the city is an overarching consideration, incorporated in all parts of the plan.

IV. Expand Transportation and Accessibility Opportunities

Gulf Shores intends to reduce the dominance of the automobile in development decisions and reduce the impacts of automobiles on the environment by encouraging development that will improve accessibility options for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. Gulf Shores will place great emphasis on improving its pedestrian, bicycle and multi-modal facilities citywide.

V. Protect and Reinvest in the Community

Gulf Shores intends to reinvest in Downtown, its beach tourism center and traditional coastal neighborhoods, and the portions of its commercial corridors that are not up to the standards of the community.

These five themes outline the rational framework that was used to convert the Gulf Shores Strategic Development Concept into the city's Future Land Use map to allocate public and private resources for development equitably and in a manner through which cost effectiveness of city services may be achieved. It furthers the intent to take charge of the image and character of the city.

The future development pattern of the city, as depicted on the Strategic Development Concept and Future Land Use maps, has been organized with appropriate recognition given to the city's green infrastructure, its street and utility infrastructure and major existing uses of land. The various types of commercial, employment, civic, institutional and recreational activity and support centers are intended to serve as magnets for activity and development. These, in turn, are intended to support the city core and the residential community of Gulf Shores in ways that will positively affect environmental quality and the transportation network.

It should be noted that designation of activity centers and corridors in this document should not be interpreted to propose, approve, deny or preclude any particular development action without full consideration of all city policies, principles or regulations. In particular, all considerations relating to site and context will be of major importance when locating any development activity or determining appropriate uses and density. These realities, plus other policies of public officials and agencies, will play a large part in determining appropriate development location and design. Similarly, the presence of adequate public infrastructure should be assured before making or proposing any significant development proposals or decisions.

This is a general, long-range plan for the city. Thus, the locations of proposed schools, parks, community facilities and other institutions shown on the Future Land Use map and described below are not meant to be precise. Rather, the symbols for each of these should be considered as "placeholders" until more specific planning may be undertaken to determine detailed needs and locations for each. In many cases, the symbol on the map will come to rest when either a public agency has determined to invest in a facility, or a private development project triggers the need and means for a location decision, acquisition and construction, development plans have been approved, property negotiations and construction plans have been prepared and financed, as appropriate.

LAND USE TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS

The following descriptions of the designations shown on the Future Land Use map proceed generally from least to most intensive uses and functions, beginning with parks and protected areas, proceeding through various types and densities of residential uses. These are followed by mixed use areas, civic and institutional, commercial, office and other employment uses, and are rounded out by industrial uses. Activity centers and neighborhoods are to be planned and designed in accord with policy and characteristics as presented throughout this plan document.

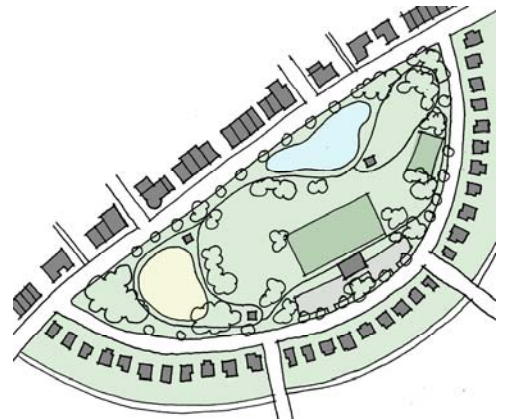
Open Space, Parks, Recreation and Protected Areas

Gulf Shores intends that the range of public holdings of park, recreation and protected open space areas include at least the following:

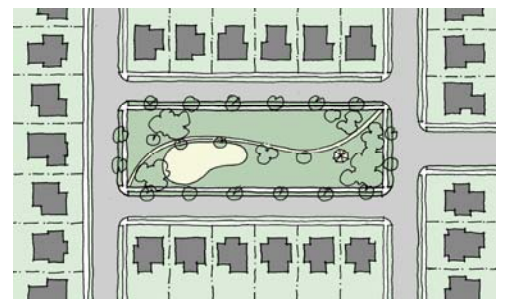
Greenways to provide opportunities for walking and bicycling, to act as wildlife corridors, development buffers, and storm water recharge areas and to provide links in the chain of the city's public park and open space system. Ideally, they should eventually include many of the city's water edges and wetlands, and appropriate wooded uplands. Greenways used for multi-purpose trails should avoid redundancy with sidewalks and bikeways, but strive to interconnect public parks and open space areas as part of the citywide system of sidewalks, trails and bicycle paths and lanes.

Major Parks to preserve the natural character of the city's green infrastructure while providing both active and passive recreation opportunities. Ideally, they should eventually include many of the city's water edges and wetlands, and appropriate wooded uplands. These parks may be important for the protection of historical sites, significant land and water features and wildlife habitat, and as outdoor recreation centers. Park facilities and buildings should foster a positive community image and sense of pride, which should be evident in the use of local materials and respect for local context. A local example is Gulf State Park.

Community Parks to serve a range of passive and active recreation needs appropriate to their location and context. They may provide a mixture of uses such as active sports fields, play areas, trails, informal practice fields, picnic areas, outdoor classrooms, and gathering places such as a community center. They should be carefully integrated into the city's green infrastructure, with a significant portion of each held in a natural state. Park facilities should foster a positive community image and sense of pride, which should be evident in the use of local materials and respect for local context. Community parks range from a few acres to upwards of five acres. A local example is Sims Park.

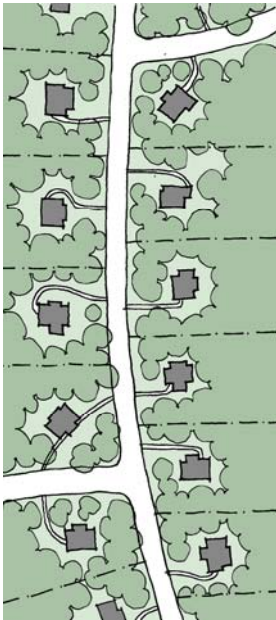


Neighborhood Parks to provide relatively small residential areas with opportunities for appropriate levels and types of both active and passive recreation. These parks should provide a place for unstructured, informal community gatherings and neighborhood events, and may include such features as shaded paths, playground equipment and open space for active play. These parks may be owned and maintained by a homeowners' association or dedicated to the city. Neighborhood parks range from a few thousand square feet to upwards of two acres. A local example is Meyer Park.



Residential

Residential uses come in many sizes, shapes, types and densities. They are noted on the Future Land Use map according to relative gross density—the relation of numbers of dwelling units to the total area of property to be devoted to those uses. Residential use gross densities are noted on the map as: Very Low Density at less than 1 unit per acre; Low Density at 1 to 4 units per acre; Medium Density at 4 to 8 units per acre and High Density at greater than 8 units per acre.



Very low-density residential uses are planned for several parts of the city, especially parcels located away from the city's core and its major arterials, and characterized by the presence of relatively high percentages of green infrastructure components. This development type and density should take careful account of the various components of the city's green infrastructure, making use of special development techniques, such as conservation subdivisions, large lots and very low overall impervious surface ratios. The character of these areas varies between suburban, estate subdivisions and more rural residential neighborhoods, both of which are dominated by generous amounts of open space. Very low-residential areas are characterized by long block lengths and limited connectivity. Streets may include swales to address runoff, rather than raised curbs. Similarly, these areas may not contain sidewalks but should be connected to the surrounding community through pedestrian and/or bicycle trails.



Low-density residential uses are typically single family detached houses on relatively large lots. This development type and density should take careful account of the various components of the city's green infrastructure, including wetlands and existing vegetation. Conservation subdivisions and low overall impervious surface ratios should be used to preserve and enhance green infrastructure elements and to ensure convenient access to natural open spaces. Blocks are generally 300 ft or greater in length, providing a moderate level of connectivity to the city street network. Sidewalks of five feet in width should be provided on both sides of each street and placed five feet or more from the road edge. Street runoff should be addressed by vegetated swales, valley gutters or raised curbs. Local streets in these areas may also accommodate on-street parking on one or both sides. However, providing on-street parking along a street lined with valley curbs can result in cars parked across the valley curb and into the tree lawn or sidewalk.



Medium-density residential uses are single family detached and attached housing on smaller lots, though some limited density multi-family uses may fit within this range. These uses are intended to be adjacent to activity centers in relatively close-in locations, including existing, central neighborhoods near the beach, lagoon, and canal. When indicated near waterfronts, the intent of this plan is to encourage, where the market allows, consolidation of properties and redevelopment rather than piecemeal infill. In these locations, re-subdivisions should include common waterfront access and view areas. Medium-density neighborhoods are highly connected to the city street network and have relatively short block lengths. Local streets include on-street parking. Sidewalks are provided on both sides of streets, often separated from the street by a tree lawn. Because lots are smaller and generally narrow, building setbacks are minimal. Green space is provided in common open spaces or neighborhood parks. Alleys provide access to parking at the rear of lots, rather than side-loaded driveways, and also provide a more discrete location for utility lines and garbage pick-up.

High-density residential uses are mostly attached single family and multi-family housing intended for infill along the beach and adjacent to the larger commercial, institutional and employment activity centers and corridors in relatively close-in locations. This pattern provides a logical transition between mixed-use or non-residential areas and lower density residential uses. High-density residential areas have a high level of connectivity to the city street network, incorporating short block lengths. Local streets should be designed to accommodate on-street parking and sidewalks on each side of the street. Sidewalks are generally separated from the street by a tree lawn of five feet or more in width. Green space is provided in common open spaces. Mid-block alleys provide access to internal parking areas and a discrete location for garbage pick-up and utility lines.

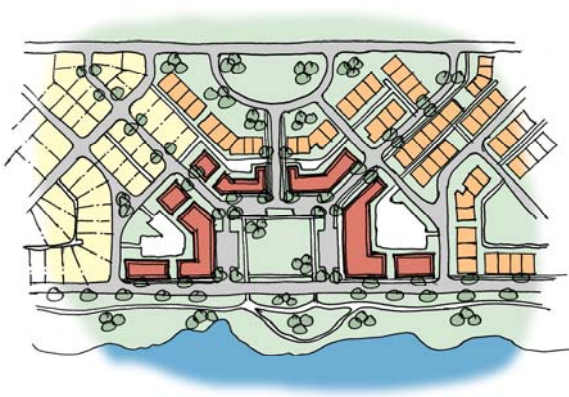
Mixed Use

This is a development type in which various primary uses—for example, Office, Civic, Institutional, Retail and Residential—may be combined (horizontally and/or vertically) in the same building or within separate buildings on the same site or nearby sites. Such mixing of uses may be suitable especially in or adjacent to the activity centers and corridors outlined in the previous chapter and shown in the Strategic Development Concept Map.

The recent trend nationwide is to carefully mix together various appropriate land uses to reduce the need for motor vehicle trips and build more walkable areas of the city. These may include regional commercial, community commercial, institutional support and some employment support activity centers. This land use type tends to: increase the types of spaces available for both living and working; encourage a mix of compatible uses and promote the upgrading of existing developed areas with buildings designed to provide a high quality pedestrian-oriented street environment. The intention is that the particular mix of uses be mutually compatible and suitable to adjacent uses.

Downtown is the city's most successful historical example of this land use type, though the mix of uses has occurred horizontally and has been of a limited intensity. Suitable future reinvestment in downtown Gulf Shores might incorporate greater density, with buildings that mix uses vertically and that are built closer to sidewalks to encourage greater pedestrian activity.

Regional scale mixed use activity centers are shown in the Strategic Development Concept. These are often located at major intersections along Highway 59, including at County Road 6, Cotton Creek Drive (Co. Rd. 4), State Route 180 (W. Fort Morgan Road), and State Route 182 (Beach Boulevard). Community scale mixed use areas are located along East First Street, Oyster Bay Road (at the planned Bon Secour development), and the eastern end of Waterway East Blvd. (formerly Mildred Casey Road). These mixed use centers are intended to accommodate relatively intense development of uses that serve the greater community and, in certain cases, tourists, as described in the *Envision Gulf Shores Plan*.



Mixed Use Village – Waterfront

A mixed use village designed to provide for a variety of land uses, including commercial, single family and multi-family development. Mixed use centers, in this context, are oriented to the waterfront, providing public pedestrian access and visual links to community open space and activity center.

Various locations are shown in as smaller scale mixed-use activity centers, including several sites along Fort Morgan Road, East Canal Drive, the eastern end of County Road 4, and along County Roads 4 and 6 near Plash Island. These locations are targets for future development or redevelopment in the form of mixed-use activity centers, in which consolidation and re-subdivision may be advantageous. Their locations allow for convenient pedestrian and bicycle access from surrounding neighborhoods and tourist lodging areas.

The sites on Fort Morgan Road especially, are intended to concentrate non-residential development into a few transit-supportive nodes, rather than encourage strip development along the length of the corridor. In some cases, these activity centers may be constructed through planned developments along waterfront property, as shown in the illustration to the left. In other

instances, these areas may arise from the development of individual properties, as shown in the illustration at right.

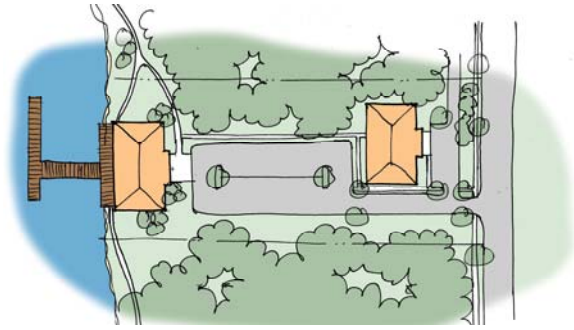
Northeastern Gulf Shores also presents an opportune location for a larger-scale mixed-use center that could capitalize on regional accessibility and bring together Gulf Shores and its neighboring cities in a cooperative development effort. This center could bring together medical facilities development with appropriate and supportive commerce and a mix of residential development.

Civic and Institutional

Civic and institutional uses are a traditional land use category typically including Institutional, Academic, Medical, Governmental and Community Service uses and lands. More recently, the trend toward larger places of worship and major medical centers (as opposed to neighborhood places of worship and freestanding hospitals) has expanded the traditional definition. These uses should be located in highly legible places where access is suitable and the overall mix of adjacent land uses may be compatible with one another.

Commercial and Office

This is a broad category of uses that typically includes beach tourism, community and neighborhood retail, office, restaurant, hospitality and accommodations, either separately or as part of a mixed-use activity center. It is intended that these uses mostly be concentrated in downtown, around the intersection of Beach Boulevard and Highway 59 (as described in the Envision Gulf Shores Plan), at commercial activity centers of various scales, and as reinvestment or infill locations along the city's major commercial corridors. The mixed use activity centers shown along Highway 59 in the Strategic Development Concept allow for continued development of regional and community scale commercial through the concentration of these uses into focused development areas, such as at County Road 6. These concentrated nodes of development will better support regional transit services and allow for greater pedestrian and bicycle access from nearby neighborhoods.

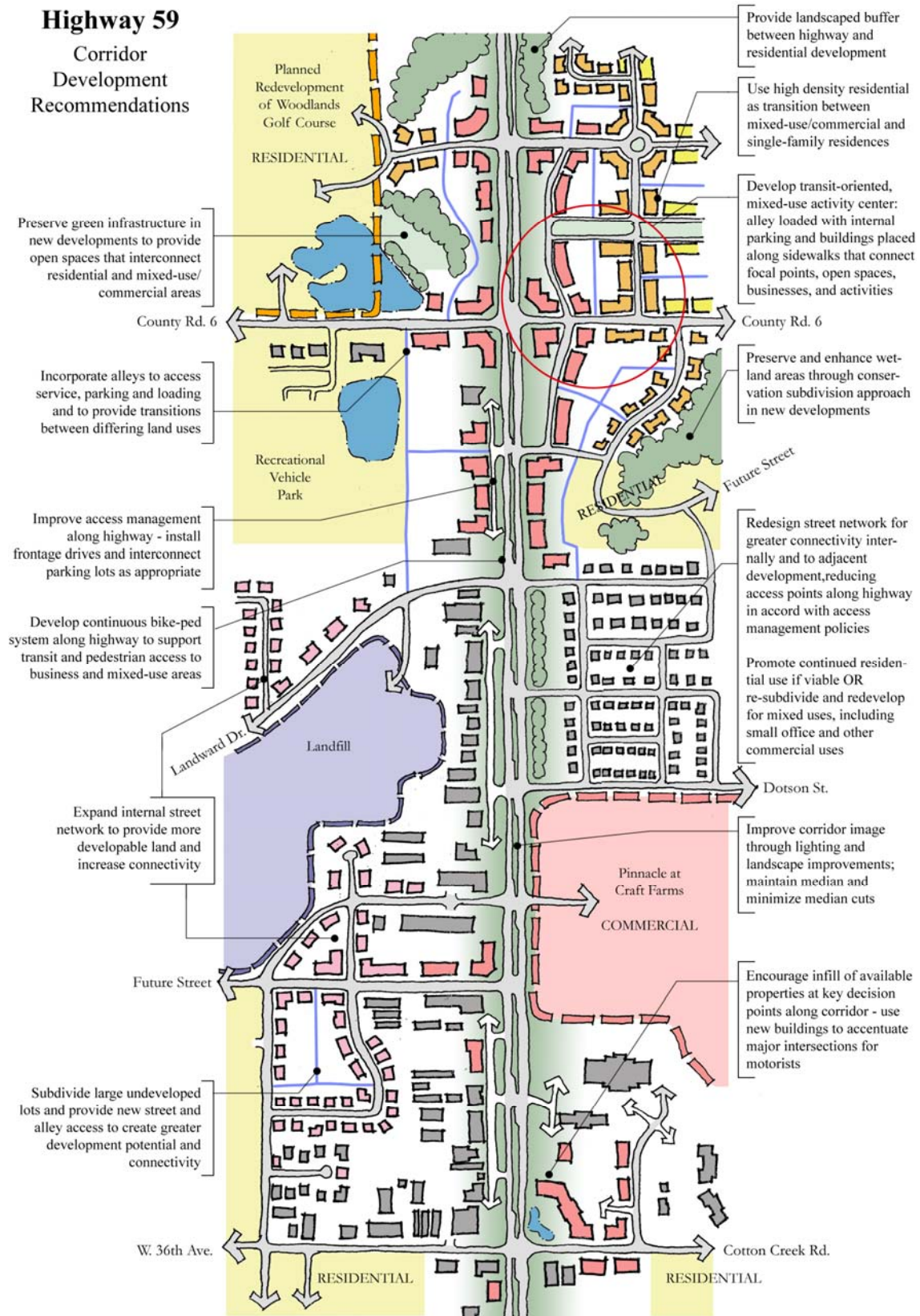


Commercial Development – Single Waterfront Lot

An example of a single parcel developed for commercial purposes and the surrounding properties are not being assembled for a large development. This illustration demonstrates desired relationships between a proposed restaurant/ tourist development that requires water frontage, allowing the primary structure to be placed near the water, with parking and appropriate landscape screening as needed from the road. The illustration also demonstrates a condition where the property owner might develop the street frontage for a neighborhood commercial use, orienting this building closer to the roadway while providing parking and service access internally. In either or both conditions, the development must respond to its context and provide pedestrian and vehicular connections to surrounding development.

Highway 59

Corridor Development Recommendations



Strip commercial development should be avoided because of its effects on traffic, transit and pedestrian accessibility and the image of the community. Strip development tends to generate excessive amounts of traffic on Highway 59 for local trips, absorbing available capacity and eventually causing delays during peak hours. Gulf Shores is a resort community, relying heavily on tourist visitation to support the local economy; and continued strip development along Highway 59, a primary image corridor, will detract from the visual experience of visitors. Instead, future development of land uses along Highway 59 should be guided by strong access management policies and capital investments and by steering commercial and office development towards mixed use activity centers. The illustration on the facing page describes improvements that can be made to this corridor through implementation of stronger policies and regulations, public investments, and focused development and redevelopment.



Recreational Vehicle developments are a land use type that require special consideration on the part of the City to determine whether proposed locations are appropriate and what design elements are needed to successfully integrate them into the surrounding community. These developments are a unique form within a broad category of lodging uses and typically occur as RV parks, in which users rent, rather than own, individual spaces. Recently, however, in resort locations such as Gulf Shores, there has been increased interest in developing RV subdivisions, in which users own individual lots within the overall development. Because of this, these recreational vehicle developments appear more similar to owner-occupied residential uses though they retain the transient characteristics of a lodging use.

Recreational Vehicle Development Review Criteria:

For the purposes of reviewing and approving these uses, the following criteria must be considered, which should be incorporated into the city's development regulations:

- Lodging use
- Recreational vehicle parks may be similar in physical form to manufactured home parks while recreational vehicle subdivisions should be designed so as to be more similar to single-family residential developments
- May be considered for development in areas already zoned for manufactured home use
- May be considered on a case-by-case basis in areas shown as either residential or non-residential in the Land Use Plan where the proposed development would share the fewest edges with residential areas, such as at the boundary between a residential area and a non-residential area OR in a location peripheral to planned or zoned residential areas and having frontage or direct access, on one side, to a major collector or higher classification road and frontage, on another side, on a water body or open space reserve
- Typically, should be avoided where the development would be surrounded on all or most sides by areas planned or zoned for residential use
- A generous open space buffer should be provided between the development and adjacent planned or zoned residential land
- RV subdivisions should be provided and designed with improvements normally required for the surrounding residential area (e.g. sidewalks, planting strips and street trees, lighting and street signs, curb type, fire hydrants, accessibility for emergency response, etc.)
- Connection to public water and sewer should be required
- Amenities available for common use of renters/owners should be provided, including a public phone, recreational space and facilities, bathroom/showers, garbage collection, etc.



Industrial

Industrial uses are typically medium to large employment centers, dominated by technology, distribution, light industrial, office, and other job-generating land uses but containing relatively few retail and service uses except those concentrated at major intersections close to the center and in other strategic locations. These uses are intended to be located in and adjacent to the city's industrial park and airport and certain lands traditionally used for these purposes.

CONCLUSION

Gulf Shores intends to direct land uses as outlined in this chapter toward lands suitable for them and for adjacent land uses in accord with the Future Land Use map and the policies of this document. The city intends that development and reinvestment should be planned, sited and designed in a manner that is compatible with the city's green infrastructure, in support of development creativity, efficiency, stability, image, diversity and control in accord with the Gulf Shores Strategic Development Concept.



V. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The city has prepared this plan as a guide to decisions regarding the subdivision and use of land, development and conservation of the city's resources, zoning and capital improvements. The plan is also intended to help Gulf Shores residents, property owners, merchants, builders, and developers invest in the city by providing a reasonable expectation of its future physical character.

The Gulf Shores Land Use Plan is to be carried out through a combination of direct public and private investment, and through public decisions by the City Council, Planning Commission and other public boards and commissions. The plan's recommendations will be translated into action through revision and continued administration and enforcement of the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations and other regulations, through a street and highway access management program in cooperation with other agencies, through budgeting and capital improvement programming and empowerment of community and neighborhood organizations and volunteers, and through public and private decisions and actions in support of planned annexation.

Master Plan Implementation Strategy:

1. *Keep the public sector focused*
2. *Get the private sector interested and involved*
3. *Get other agencies playing on our team*
4. *Take direct action with our own money*
5. *Shape the actions of others with good laws*
6. *Provide incentives for others to take the lead*
7. *Use every power and dollar to support plan implementation.*

Gulf Shores is a municipal corporation, formed under powers granted by the State of Alabama. The city has used its grant of the police power to adopt and enforce growth and development regulations. The city has used its power to tax in order to plan for and implement a budgeting system that includes capital investments for infrastructure facilities and services that it uses to help shape growth and development. Gulf Shores has used the power of eminent domain (the power to force sale of private property for valid public use) sparingly to enable various infrastructure investments and redevelopment actions in support of public policy and plans. All of these tools will continue to be used together to shape Gulf Shores in accord with the city's Land Use Plan.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT REGULATION

Several of the key elements of the city's development management system—such as the Zoning Ordinance and Map, Subdivision Regulations, among others—are based on the police power. Together, the elements of this system address land use, site planning, the size and location of buildings and other structures, aesthetics and signage. Each of these regulations is framed to account for the health, safety and welfare of the community—the so-called “valid public purposes” of the municipality—and the appropriate enabling

authority in each case. Each must also respect the principles of due process of law, non-discrimination in their application, profitable use of land, freedom of speech, and the special concerns associated with balancing individual costs against anticipated public benefits.

Zoning Ordinance and Map Considerations

Gulf Shores has adopted and enforces a zoning ordinance to regulate development within districts as shown on the city's Zoning Map. The Land Use Plan and its Future Land Use Map should not be confused with the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map. The Land Use Plan has been prepared as a *guide* to public and private investment in land development and infrastructure. In contrast, the *zoning ordinance* is a regulatory tool used by the city to influence and direct development of the community in ways that reflect the direction and desired form called for in the Land Use Plan. The following outline highlights the differences:

Land Use Plan	Zoning Ordinance
○ <i>Provides general policy guidance</i>	○ <i>Provides specific regulations</i>
○ <i>Describes conditions desired in the long term – not necessarily existing or recommended use(s)</i>	○ <i>Describes what is and what is not currently allowed today</i>
○ <i>Includes recommendations that involve other agencies and groups</i>	○ <i>Deals with development issues under city control</i>
○ <i>Intentionally flexible to allow responses to changing conditions</i>	○ <i>Fairly rigid, requires formal amendment to change</i>
○ <i>General land use categories</i>	○ <i>Zoning districts</i>
○ <i>General land use locations</i>	○ <i>Parcel-specific designations</i>

In addition, planned developments, requiring preparation and approval of overall master development plans and similar modifications in accord with the Land Use Plan, are intended to allow innovative approaches to development, in recognition of the fact that livability—and good design—cannot be legislated, but can be encouraged.

As a part of the plan implementation system, Gulf Shores intends to keep the zoning ordinance and the Zoning Map current to reflect and incorporate the land development policy of this plan as appropriate to time, place and circumstances. The following lists the major goals of the Zoning Ordinance update:

- *improve organization to make the document easier to use and understand*
- *remove redundancy and conflicts*

- *update and add new definitions*
- *use illustrations to increase user-friendliness*
- *incorporate recent amendments*
- *consolidate extraneous or defunct zoning classifications and add new districts where necessary*
- *incorporate standards for conservation subdivisions, access management, land use buffers, and screening*
- *refine administrative procedures to make review and approval more efficient while maintaining effectiveness*
- *correct regulations that unnecessarily conflict with or discourage mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented, compact development patterns*
- *update parking and signage regulations*

Subdivision Regulation Considerations

Gulf Shores intends to revise the Subdivision Regulations to reflect and incorporate the land development policy of this plan as appropriate. Alabama courts have long recognized the importance of subdivision regulation to the implementation of city plans. For example, in *Roberson v. City of Montgomery*, 233 Sp. 2d 69, 72 (Ala. 1970), the Alabama Supreme Court determined that,

Unlike zoning, subdivision regulations relate to a systematic and orderly development of a community with particular regard for streets, parks, industrial and commercial undertakings, civic beauty and other kindred matters properly within the police power.

The Gulf Shores Land Use Plan establishes a means for meeting the city’s goal to create neighborhoods of distinct character, compatible with what it considers the city’s “green infrastructure” as described below and mapped in this document. The plan sets up a logical framework for growth and development of the city and its planning area while conserving its strongest assets. It also establishes standards for various design elements appropriate to context. For this reason, infrastructure requirements and design standards need not—and should not—necessarily be uniform across the entire city and its planning jurisdiction. Rather, the city’s physical elements should take their cue from a combination of existing and planned development patterns, such as those included in the city’s Subdivision Regulations.

The city’s green infrastructure includes surface water resources, floodways and floodplains, wetlands, steep slopes, parks and protected areas. Development should consist of land uses, overall gross densities and character as called for in the plan to recognize and respond appropriately to those resources and conditions. Through the use of planning and design standards geared toward that area and its resources, the city’s Subdivision Regulations are intended to help implement this Land Use Plan.

For example, in the case of street networks, the appropriate dimension and allocation of right-of-way space, and the size and character of the travel lanes and edge treatments, including buffer areas, drainage improvements, and pedestrian and bicycle facilities, will affect the context of the city and its planning jurisdiction, its development patterns and anticipated future uses of land. Future changes to the city's Subdivision Regulations should emphasize the construction of "complete streets", street environments that safely and appropriately accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists in addition to motorists, especially in non-residential, mixed-use, and medium and high density residential developments. Street design standards for different land use and density contexts should be incorporated into the Subdivision Regulations.

Likewise, it is generally recognized that all open space is not equal, and that open space is not simply the space left over between the buildings when all the development is complete. There should be a reason for the open space (such as resource protection or passive recreation), a high degree of accessibility and good connectivity of its parts for the benefit of the public and wildlife. This argues strongly for placing certain open space standards in the Subdivision Regulations rather than relying solely on zoning requirements, for it is in the act of subdividing that open space may be secured or lost.

By placing concerns for green infrastructure and open space early in the order of design, the intentions of the Land Use Plan more likely will be met. Open space can be used to improve natural drainage and infiltration, which better protects resources when incorporated as the preferred strategy, prior to property being set out for development.

Additional Development Review Criteria

In addition to the general considerations above, development criteria for activity centers and neighborhoods may be added to the development management system. The following should be considered.

Green Infrastructure Management. The Planning Commission, in support of policies of the Land Use Plan should consider use of a checklist such as the following during the review process for all development projects requiring site plan approval:

- *Favor citywide low gross density / focused medium and higher net density development to retain useful open space, recreation opportunity and natural resource and watershed protection.*
- *Design and build all streets at the minimum width necessary for their intended use.*
- *Minimize the use of cul-de-sacs and set their minimum required radius to accommodate emergency and maintenance vehicles.*
- *Limit impervious parking area to that actually required for the intended use to help make shared parking solutions attractive.*
- *Reduce overall imperviousness of parking lots by permitting pervious materials in spillover parking areas.*

- *Require property owner association management in perpetuity of common open space.*
- *Limit clearing and grading of woodland, wetlands, habitat and other native vegetation to the minimum amount needed for building areas, access and fire protection.*
- *Plan, design, construct and manage community open space, street rights-of-way, parking lot islands, and other landscaped areas to assure maintenance of natural vegetation.*

Residential Development and Neighborhoods. As another example of using the policies of the Land Use Plan as an overall guide, the Planning Commission should consider use of a checklist such as the following during the development review process for any *residential* development requiring a master development plan or site plan approval in order to encourage the planning, design and development of viable neighborhoods:

- *The neighborhood should be planned and designed in a manner appropriate to its context—to reflect its location in the community and its relation to the natural environment.*
- *Neighborhoods should be designed to conserve natural systems and thereby require less capital investment for earthwork, clearing and drainage.*
- *Net development density should be allowed to increase when closer to commercial centers and corridors.*
- *Outdoor places other than private yards should be provided in the neighborhood so that children may have the opportunity to play safely away from their own homes, yet nearby.*
- *At least 15% of the total residential development should be dedicated to accessible, usable, pedestrian-sensitive open space that includes appropriate focal points.*
- *There should be provided at least one special gathering place, such as a neighborhood green or other usable community open space, in each neighborhood. The gathering space should be pedestrian oriented, with easy vehicular and pedestrian access to all parts of the neighborhood.*
- *The neighborhood should be designed and built with complete, walkable, and interconnected streets. Street frontage on existing roadways should be completed with curb, gutter and sidewalks.*
- *Neighborhoods should accommodate the access needs of motorists while providing a convenient and safe environment for pedestrians and cyclists.*
- *Sidewalks should be installed along all street frontages as needed for pedestrian mobility and safety appropriate to the location.*
- *Neighborhood pedestrian and bike accessibility should be enhanced through use of cul-de-sac linkages to adjacent streets, as well as trails within greenways or other open space systems, schools, adjacent neighborhoods and commercial areas as appropriate.*

- *Blocks longer than 500 feet should provide pedestrian cut-through paths to adjacent streets.*
- *Street trees should be planted as specified by the city and pedestrian-scale light fixtures—generally twelve feet in total height—should be provided along all areas accessible to pedestrians.*
- *Interconnected neighborhood streets should be provided to assure alternate routes and thereby diffuse automobile traffic.*
- *Neighborhood street environments should feature relatively narrow driving surfaces, ample sidewalks, street trees and front porches.*
- *Neighborhood streets should be planned and designed to provide a “calm” environment where drivers realize that driving fast or aggressively is inappropriate.*

Commercial Development. As just one example regarding activity centers, the Planning Commission, using the policies of the Land Use Plan as an overall guide, should consider use of a checklist such as the following during the development review process for all *commercial* activity centers requiring a master development plan or site plan approval:

- *Building façades should be designed and built to provide visual interest and to avoid uniform styles.*
- *A building’s ground floor facing a collector or arterial street should contain a minimum of 50% unobscured windows, doors or display areas.*
- *The front of primary buildings should be oriented toward pedestrian circulation systems, with emphasis on directing people toward the public street system.*
- *Street frontage on existing roadways should be completed with curb, gutter and sidewalks as needed for pedestrian mobility and safety appropriate to the location.*
- *All streets should be designed to promote traffic movement conducive to pedestrian safety and to provide direct routes between nearby destinations.*
- *Parking lots should be designed to provide through pedestrian paths, clearly identifiable by changes in material or elevation.*
- *Street trees should be planted as specified by the city.*
- *Surface parking lots should include at least 5% of the total surface area devoted to landscaping to be distributed, designed, installed and maintained in accord with an overall plan approved by the Planning Commission.*
- *Surface parking lots containing 50 or more spaces should be divided into smaller areas separated by a building or a group of buildings or by landscaped areas at least 10 feet wide.*

Accessibility and Access Management. The Planning Commission, using the policies of the Land Use Plan as an overall guide, should consider use of a checklist such as the

following during the development review process to assure appropriate consideration of any arterial or collector streets that may be included in the development:

- *The distance between major intersections and driveways should be sufficient to separate points of traffic conflict. As a general rule, driveways should not be located within the area of influence of intersections.*
- *Turning movements at unsignalized driveways and intersections should be restricted by limiting the use of full directional unsignalized streets and driveways. Full movement intersections should serve multiple developments through joint use driveways or cross access easements.*
- *Design standards for access spacing, the length of turn lanes and tapers, and driveway dimensions should be applied on arterials and major collectors. More restrictive standards should apply to thoroughfares with greater traffic and speeds.*
- *Access to existing or future arterials, where there is little current development and land subdivision, should be provided through construction of frontage or “backage” roads. Frontage roads should be pulled back from intersections along the arterial to ensure adequate stacking space at the intersection. Backage roads are service roads that are aligned along the rear of the properties fronting the arterial.*
- *Traffic signals should only be installed when appropriate studies indicate their spacing and interconnection can be accomplished without significant adverse impacts on corridor capacity.*
- *Left and right turn lanes should be required for all public streets and major access points to activity centers.*
- *Shared use driveways should be required to reduce the proliferation of driveways and to preserve the capacity of arterial and collector corridors.*

SPECIFIC PLANS AND PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The Gulf Shores Land Use Plan will be refined and detailed from time to time through preparation and adoption of Specific Plans. Periodic plan amendments and refinements are essential to consideration of planning for, designing, enabling and appropriately regulating the orderly development of all activity centers, focus areas and corridors. It will also be necessary for proper consideration of potential redevelopment areas in accord with Alabama law. Through this extension of the planning process, city officials and staff, residents, property owners and developers may come together, accompanied by representatives of the city at large, as appropriate, to plan in more detail for creative development, redevelopment or simply enhancement of the city.

The Specific Plan detailing and refinement process should continue to emerge naturally from the need to keep the plan current and to regulate orderly development and revitalization of the city. Upgrading of various neighborhoods and activity centers, short of redevelopment, would be appropriate subjects for the Specific Plan process. This type of planning may include special area studies and plans, as market or physical

conditions or level of interest on the part of local citizens or the Planning Commission may warrant.

For example, consideration of any rezoning to enable development, redevelopment or expansion of activity centers, focus areas or corridors indicated in the plan should first entail preparation of a Specific Plan and Planning Commission adoption of the plan for the area in question. Examples of such areas include Downtown Gulf Shores, the proposed Artists Village along Canal Road east of Highway 59, and the County Roads 4 and 6 area in the northwesterly portion of the city.

Development of large properties or ones to be developed intensively—typically those that would be subject to Planning Commission review and adoption of a master development plan—should be modeled after and compatible with an adopted Specific Plan that includes the area to be rezoned. Preparation of a Specific Plan could be set in motion by direction of the Planning Commission—on its own volition, at the request of the City Council, or in response to petition by area residents, property owners and/or developers.

Specific Plans may also serve to support and detail the Gulf Shores Land Use Plan through detailed planning and design within an area of interest—thematic or geographic. This might include citywide sidewalk and street tree plans, a master bicycle and/or walking trail plan, or perhaps a gateway and corridor plan. Each Specific Plan would help to assure that the public interest in various areas of interest in the community—be it thematic or geographic—and systematic reinvestment in the city will be kept clearly in mind and faithfully implemented through both public and private sector investments.

KEEPING THE LAND USE PLAN UP TO DATE

Land use planning is typically viewed as an occasional activity generally overseen by the Planning Commission, whereas budget preparation and adoption is an annual responsibility of the City Council mandated by Alabama law. As a result, Land Use Plans—and especially those for cities (such as Gulf Shores) whose land is under increasing market pressures—may quickly become dated. Connections between the Land Use Plan and the city's capital budget—and both are critical tools of local government—may tend to weaken over time. These problems may be remedied by scheduling and coordinating an annual planning update with the budgeting process to help the city reach its potential. Coordination of the planning and annual budget processes will increase the likelihood that city staff and private citizens alike will make public investment decisions in accord with the Strategic Development Concept.

A Land Use Plan update included in the annual budgeting process may be used to help the city better determine capital budget priorities, consider plan and development regulation amendments, and coordinate public investments toward reaching the vision set out in the Land Use Plan. To coordinate Gulf Shores development policies and their implementation, each city department, board and commission (and the non-city boards,

commissions, agencies and other groups that may be eligible for funding assistance from the city) should review the Land Use Plan and submit a report to the mayor early in the budget season that would include the following:

- *All tasks perceived to be essential for achieving the Land Use Plan during the coming year that either are or should be the responsibility of the respondent.*
- *Suggested changes in city programs – to include but not be limited to regulations, capital investments, operation and maintenance, and intracity and intergovernmental coordination – the respondent perceives to be in the best interests of overall Land Use Plan implementation.*
- *Suggested changes in city policies toward growth and development as those are outlined in the Land Use Plan.*
- *A preliminary budget proposal, including capital equipment and investments needed by the respondent to deal with the above, and the portion of those costs it is requested the city bear.*

The mayor's office would collect this information for consideration in formulating a draft capital budget and suggested Land Use Plan amendments for the coming year. Following discussions with department heads and others as appropriate, the mayor's office would forward a draft capital budget and suggested plan amendments to the Planning Commission, whose members would review it in light of the city's Land Use Plan. The Planning Commission would report to the mayor's office the results of its review regarding proposed capital investments, and any recommendations for Land Use Plan revisions, adjustments to development management system ordinance amendments and intra-governmental and inter-governmental coordination.

The mayor's office would prepare a proposed capital budget and revenue forecast, and present proposed city budgets to the City Council. The Planning Commission would act, as it deems appropriate, regarding recommended amendments to the Land Use Plan and Subdivision Regulations and suggest appropriate Zoning Ordinance amendments to the City Council. The City Council would hold hearings to discuss proposed amendments to city regulations prior to adoption.

Coordination of the city's continuing planning and capital budgeting systems as outlined above would likely produce the following results:

- *The Land Use Plan will be updated more or less continually, in coordination with the capital budget.*
- *The Land Use Plan and capital budget will likely be increasingly targeted toward achieving the city's visions for itself.*

Keeping the Land Use Plan up to date is an important task. Through the process described above, the plan can be refined and detailed on a regular basis through preparation and adoption of plan amendments. In this way, the plan amendment and refinement process may be more or less automatic.

ANNEXATION

As described in Chapter II, the city should develop a plan and program for annexation that supports its planned image, health, safety, and welfare. Each annexation by the city should serve the vision and goals of the community and not simply be a reaction to individual requests. In developing an annexation strategy, the city must evaluate the value that lands may have, in terms of not only revenue, but also toward implementation of the goals of this plan. By that same token, the costs to serve annexed land must also be considered. Certain land uses and densities of development will generate less property or sales tax revenue than the costs to provide them with various public services. This is often true of lower density residential areas. However, certain areas may be very strategic in carrying out goals, whether it be to prevent unwanted development or to encourage new development (or redevelopment).

Some of the recommendations of this plan will require annexation in order for the city to have the planning and regulatory control to affect the desired outcomes. Examples of this can be seen northward along State Highway 59 or west along Fort Morgan Road. Both of these areas call for particular approaches to commercial development, conservation, and access management that are not likely to occur without the city's intervention.

Areas unincorporated and un-zoned present further possible roadblocks to the implementation of this plan. For this reason efforts should be focused on organized actions to annex these areas into the city.

Another issue to be taken into consideration for future annexations is the benefit of having more regular boundaries, which can make planning for public services less complicated and the provision of those services more cost-efficient. Proactive annexation to regularize the city's boundaries will have a generally positive impact, for instance, on police and other emergency respondents. The city's annexation strategy, therefore, must be coordinated with public service, land use and development goals.

Annexation Criteria

As the city considers annexation of new areas, the ability to protect the city and its fiscal base, people and resources, as well as assure the continuing ability to provide services, will be prime considerations. In general, annexation decisions should take into account at least the following questions and criteria, in addition to all elements of this Land Use Plan, when considering the appropriateness of any particular annexation.

- *Efficiency of providing services—will the annexation result in demand on public facilities and services that may exceed the capacity of such facilities and services, or will annexation cause or eliminate awkward and irregular boundaries that cause difficulty or inefficiencies in supplying utilities and services? These conditions should be avoided or at least minimized.*

- *Fiscal soundness—will annexation of the property significantly add to the revenue base of the city? Comprehensive annexations that “pay their way” by including commercial areas whose taxation may help to cover the cost of necessary support services should have priority.*
- *Image compatibility or environmental enhancement—is the property to be annexed consistent with Gulf Shores standards, character and image as outlined in the Land Use Plan, or might annexation allow for the elimination of existing or potential land uses and improvements considered a blighting or deteriorating influence? Might annexation promote environmental protection or perhaps prevent untimely or inappropriate development of property?*



VI. CONCLUSION

This is a long-range plan. The plan does not provide “quick fix” solutions, nor should it be viewed simply as an economic development platform. Rather, this Land Use Plan is intended to strengthen the quality of life in Gulf Shores over the long term. As such, the plan must remain a living document, able to grow and change as local conditions change. To do so, it must be updated and amended on a regular basis as described in the previous chapter.

Plan implementation will take time and goodwill. Gulf Shores must strive to interest and involve even more people in setting and implementing the community vision. City government must continue to gather other agencies, public and private, onto the same team. The city must continue to prioritize and take direct action on various recommendations of this plan by spending local tax dollars. Further, city officials must help shape the action of others with not just more regulation, but more *effective* regulation. The city must be willing to provide selected incentives to encourage others to take the lead in development activities that would further implementation of the plan’s policies. And finally, city officials must strive to use every power they have under the law in concert with every public investment they make to support plan implementation.

The Land Use Plan is intended to evolve and grow in response to changes in public values and changes in market and physical conditions. Only through continuing use, evaluation, detailing, reconsideration and amendment can the plan fully serve Gulf Shores, and only then can the people of Gulf Shores use it fully and creatively as they seek achievement of their comprehensive vision for the community.

VII. AMENDMENTS

1. RV Uses – Adopted by Planning Commission, April 22, 2008

APPENDIX

TOWN MEETING NOTES

Citizens and visitors and city officials participated in a Town Meeting on February 1, 2007. During the meeting, participants responded to a series of questions designed to elicit comments and suggestions that would help the Planning Commission and City Council prepare a physical vision for the city as they considered its future. The following is an outline of the responses in each of several categories.

ASSETS

- Beaches
- Lagoon
- Little canals
- Low density
- Community character
- Restaurants
- Airport
- Boating and fishing
- Golf
- Tennis
- Public beach access
- Sports Park
- Recreation Center
- Bon Secour Wildlife Refuge
- Sidewalks and bike lanes
- Civic Center
- Library

ISSUES

- Limited access across canal
- Traffic congestion during peak periods
- Not enough sidewalks
- Hwy. 59 the only way in/out of town
- No entertainment district
- Not enough businesses
- Lack of convenient, mixed use areas serving neighborhoods
- Undersized schools
- No convention facilities
- No commercial service at airport
- Limited public access to beach
- Limited accessibility along beach
- Limited boat access to Gulf/Lagoon
- Slow restoration of beach areas
- Underused/overcrowded beach areas
- County/city boundary and zoning
- Regulation of business development
- Drainage
- Road maintenance
- Unkempt vacant lots

WHY LIVE, WORK, INVEST IN GULF SHORES

- Hometown feel with resort element
- Small town atmosphere
- People know each other
- Family environment
- A place kids will return to
- Low crime rate, safety
- Beach
- Nature and wildlife
- Variety of recreation (fishing, golf, etc.)
- Schools
- Lower taxes than elsewhere
- Business opportunities

MISSING FROM CITYWIDE VISIONS

- Hospital
- Tourist destinations (other than beach)
- Shopping
- Convention center
- Cultural or fine arts center
- Commercial air service
- Boardwalk and fishing piers
- Distributed recreation areas
- Open space
- Express road to I-65
- Traffic management
- Accessibility
- Transit
- Walkability
- Little beach town aspect (Gulf Place)
- Affordability
- Stronger code enforcement

MISSING FROM NEIGHBORHOOD VISIONS



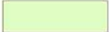

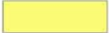






- Sidewalks
- Bike paths
- Consistent road maintenance
- Little Lagoon access (boats, pedestrians, bicycles)
- Navigable canals
- Neighborhood interaction
- Dining within walking distance
- Small-scale commerce
- Street lighting
- Improved drainage
- Underground utilities
- Landscaping
- Parking management

BENCHMARKS FOR TESTING THE PLAN

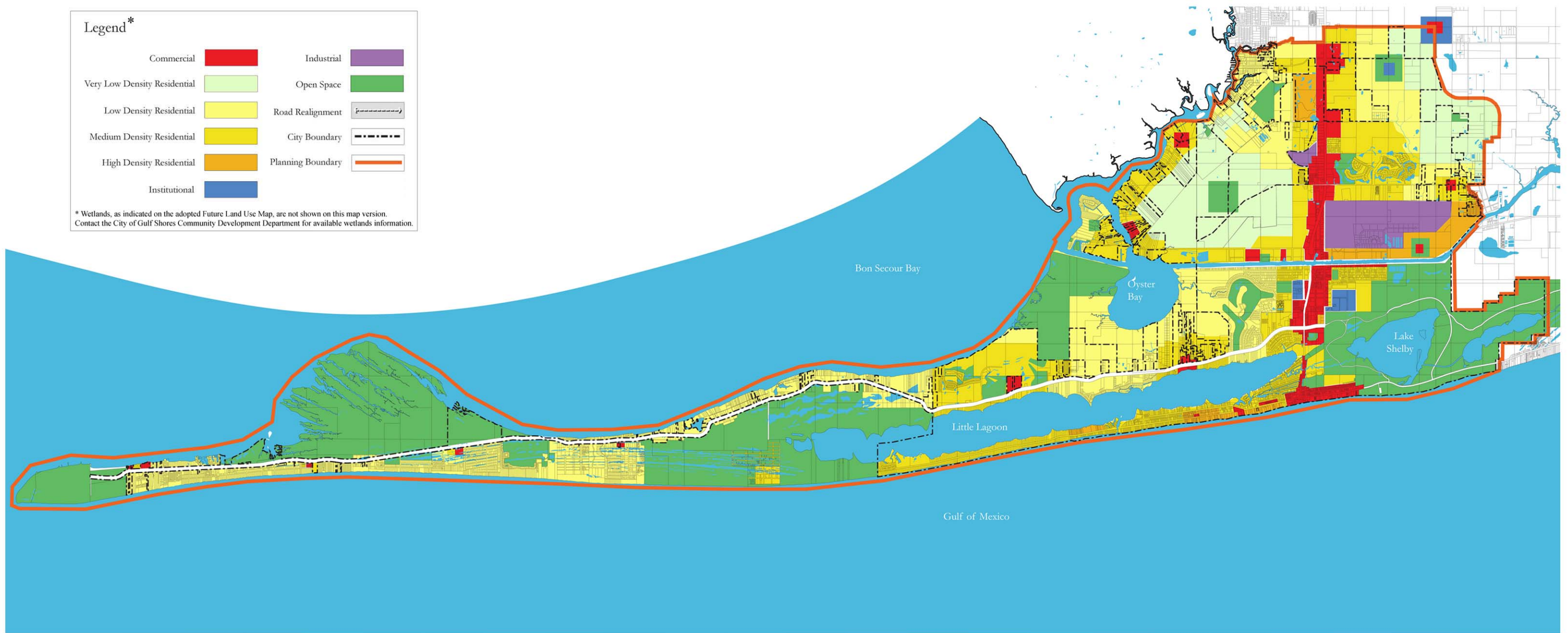
- West Beach boat access
- Commercial air service
- Gulf Place built
- Beach area beautification
- Commercial at beach
- The image of Hwy. 59
- Quaint downtown/low-key village
- Accessibility – walking, biking, transit
- Bustling school system
- Small-scale, neighborhood commercial
- Neighborhood green space
- Natural habitats preserved

FUTURE LAND USE MAPS

Legend*

Commercial		Industrial	
Very Low Density Residential		Open Space	
Low Density Residential		Road Realignment	
Medium Density Residential		City Boundary	
High Density Residential		Planning Boundary	
Institutional			

* Wetlands, as indicated on the adopted Future Land Use Map, are not shown on this map version. Contact the City of Gulf Shores Community Development Department for available wetlands information.



GULF SHORES

Future Land Use





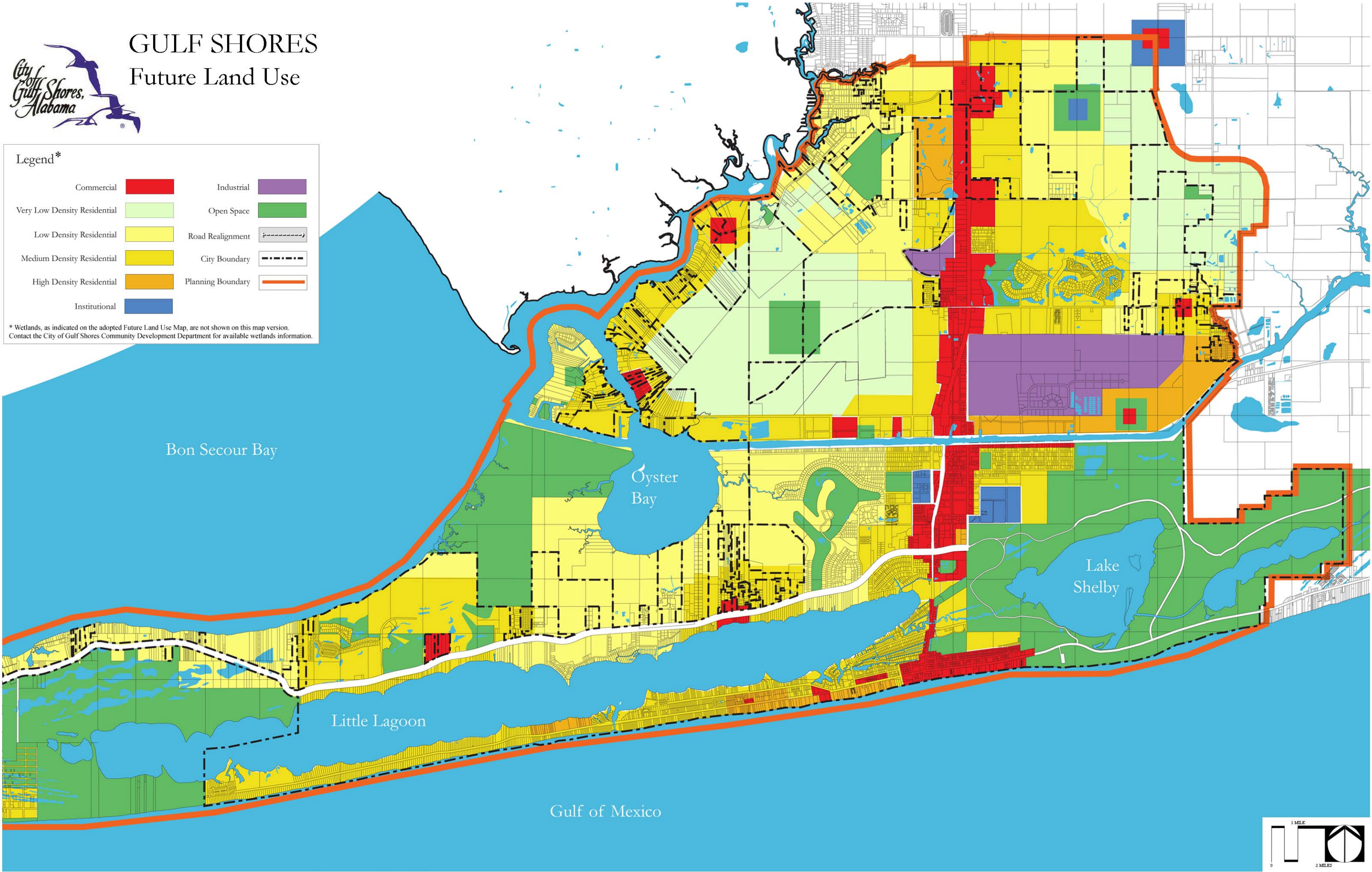
GULF SHORES

Future Land Use

Legend*

Commercial		Industrial	
Very Low Density Residential		Open Space	
Low Density Residential		Road Realignment	
Medium Density Residential		City Boundary	
High Density Residential		Planning Boundary	
Institutional			

* Wetlands, as indicated on the adopted Future Land Use Map, are not shown on this map version. Contact the City of Gulf Shores Community Development Department for available wetlands information.



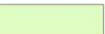

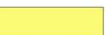
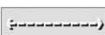









GULF SHORES

Future Land Use

Legend*

Commercial		Industrial	
Very Low Density Residential		Open Space	
Low Density Residential		Road Realignment	
Medium Density Residential		City Boundary	
High Density Residential		Planning Boundary	
Institutional			

* Wetlands, as indicated on the adopted Future Land Use Map, are not shown on this map version.
Contact the City of Gulf Shores Community Development Department for available wetlands information.



This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.